FROM

UNKNOWN WORLDS

An Anthology of Modern Fantasy for Grownups

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IN CANADA

foreword

The stories contained herein are fantasy, selected from the pages of the magazine "Unknown Worlds"—but a type of fantasy that is decidedly not standard, conventional, or stock stuff. The old "Unknown Worlds" believed that fantasy was intended for fun; it used the familiar creatures of mythology and folklore, but treated them in a most disrespectful fashion. Fantasy—and the Things of fantasy—are, we felt, much more fun than anything else, if you'll just take off those traditional wrappings of the "grim and ghastly."

This, then, is an anthology of the Light Fantastic, in which werewolves get the hotfoot, demons are haunted, and anything goes—provided it's fun.

It's perfectly true that the fantasy chiller has a place; we agree to that, and you'll find them with us, too. But not, please, the gloom and terror spread on with a trowel, driven in with a mallet, and staked out with an oak stave through its heart. Horror injected with a sharp and poisoned needle is just as effective as when applied with the blunt-instrument technique of the so-called Gothic Horror tale.

But this foreword business can only indicate a philosophy; pitch in, friend, and have fun with fiends, worry werewolves, but look out for The Hexer!

To those who have read "Unknown Worlds" in the past, this is familiar stuff. To those who have not read it before—we're sorry, but you're out of luck. There are no back copies to be had.

The Editor.

FROM UNKNOWN WORLDS

A Street & Smith Publication

A Collection Of Stories From Street & Smith's Unknown Worlds

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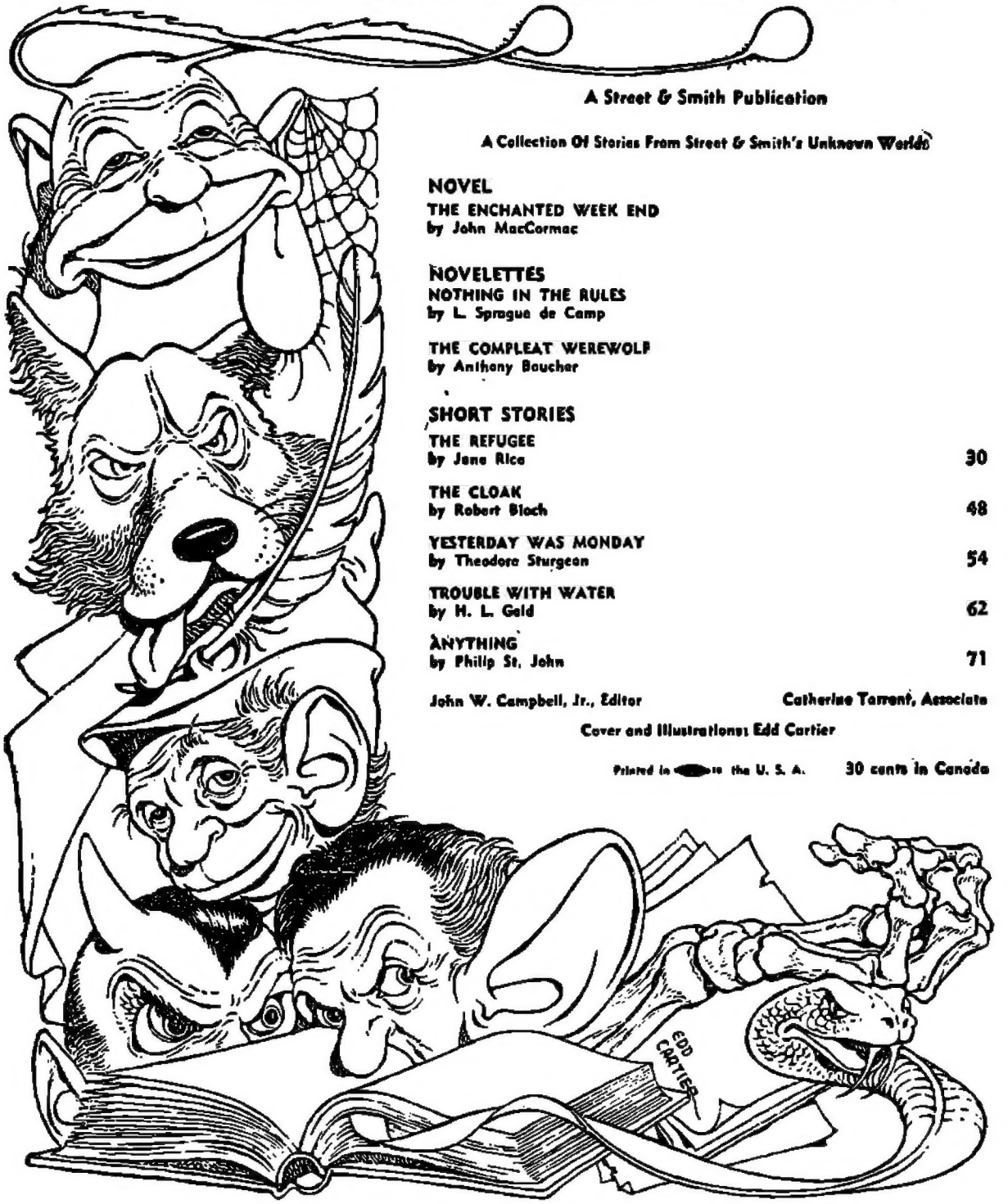

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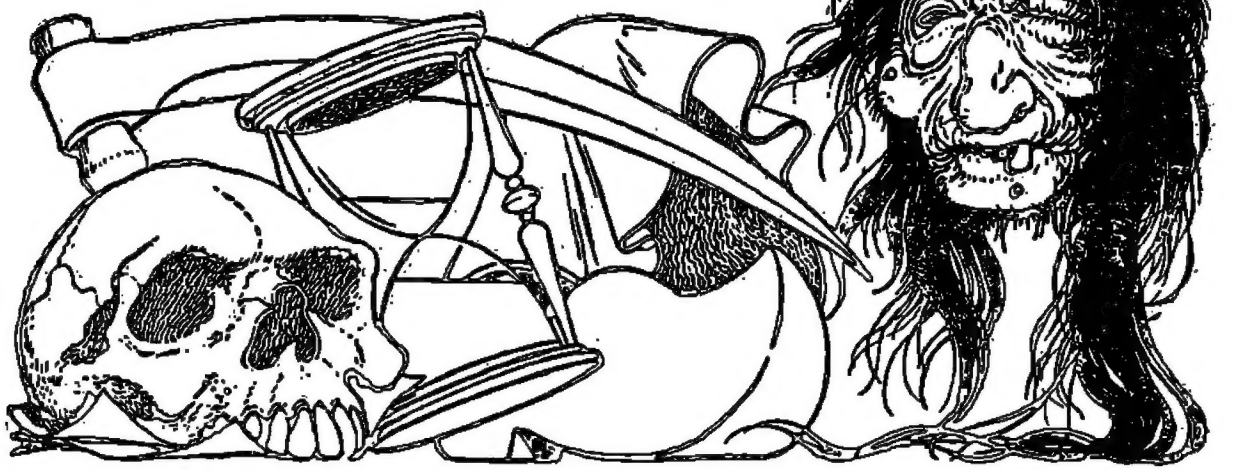


THE ENCHANTED WEEK END

BY JOHN MACCORMAC

Unquestionably Merlin's magic still was potent — but it lacked, somewhat, in discretion.

To the lodge gates of Castle Enniscrow was four hours by train from London and another half hour by motor. From gate to castle was five more minutes. That was a long journey in England, but James Fielden did not begrudge it when a winding drive finally burst into open parkland and Enniscrow became visible among its lawns and flower beds. There was a Celtic darkness over all this land of Cornwall, in the hair and eyes and complexions of its people. The trees of Enniscrow Wood were clad in a danker, lusher foliage, and their trunks and limbs looked old and twisted. A place for dryads—or Druids. With the September sun setting behind it Castle Enniscrow—its older wing at any rate —looked ancient and enchanted, its walls clothed and its windows veiled by blue-green ivy. A place for dreams and spells.

It was dreams, but not spells, that brought the purely American James Fielden to the old, and purely English, castle. Fielden had dreams of proving that the English didn't know where their own King Arthur had ruled; Fielden believed he had ruled in Cornwall rather than in Wales, as the English insisted. Castle Enniscrow should have some old records, and might—if legend served—have records of Arthur and Merlin.

It had taken a bit of wangling. James Fielden himself might not have accomplished it; he was a scholar, and known to and among scholars. Castle Enniscrow was not acquainted with scholars—they went in more for sporting names here. But James Fielden's polo-playing brother was a different matter; a letter of introduction from him carried weight and authority with the friends of the Enniscrows—if it did, perhaps, carry a bit of a wrong impression. James Fielden did not play polo; he did not play in fact. Sports were a field of activity that did not interest him, because he was, and always had been, unquestionably bad at anything in the line.

Old manuscripts, though, and libraries—

His eye followed the heavy, lichen-encrusted old stones of Castle Enniscrow's early wing. The great buttresses and narrow windows had been built for purposes other than containing a collection of manuscripts, though this, he understood, was the present function.

But it was at a porticoed entrance gate in the newer wing that James Fielden was deposited. It wasn't

ancient nor dreamlike. Although his bedroom, he thought when a footman showed him up to it, was not a bad place for a nightmare. It was not the fault of the room—which, if overlarge, was well proportioned—but of the decorations. There was a tasteful congeries of bows, arrows, assagais, knives and axes. There was also a collection of animal heads which James was ready to believe were remarkable specimens of their kind, but seemed somewhat out of place in a bedroom. Particularly the head of a huge and revolting warthog which, with singular disregard for esthetic standards, had been given a place of honor where it could not escape the regard of the innocent spectator, nor he its glassy stare.

The havoc wrought on James was so obvious that the footman felt explanation was necessary.

"Belonged to General Enniscrow, Sir Bertram's uncle and a famous big game hunter, the room did, sir. The general had to keep to his room in his old age, and liked to have his victims where he could see them, as you might say."

Feeling that if he stayed long enough the general might posthumously bag one more victim, James hurriedly bathed and dressed and escaped downstairs, reflecting that the Enniscrows must be made of pretty stern stuff. There was, he immediately noticed, a look of hard fitness about most of their guests. But Lady Enniscrow proved to be the motherly, if slightly weather-beaten, type of hostess, and all apologies.

"Mr. Fielden, isn't it? Of course we've all heard about your brother. So sorry we had to put you in the museum—you're not a big game hunter yourself by any good luck? No?—but we have a house party for the hunting—it begins on Monday, you know—and it was the only decent-sized room we had left. If it hadn't been for a tiresome bazaar in the village I would have been on hand to break the blow for you. As for Bertie, well, you see they've made him master of the Bottesmore, so naturally he lives at the kennels all day and at seven comes back and howls for his food."

Sir Bertram came up. He was tall and rawboned. The nostrils of his long, straight nose quivered slightly when he talked. He had been descanting on the proper care and education of fox-hounds to a reverent audience of spinsters with that sandy, windburned look that marks the skirted young of the English county family. At his wife's remark he parted his large and curiously stony teeth in a smile.

"Better than growling after it, what?" he whickered, a witticism greeted by a whinny of appreciation from the outdoor maidens.

"It is my duty to warn you, Mr. Fielden," said Lady Enniscrow gravely, "that if you are going to hunt with the Bottesmore, you must learn to laugh at my husband's jokes. Laugh and the hunt laughs with you is his rule."

"I would make a point of laughing until I fell off my horse," said James politely, "only I shan't be hunting with the Bottesmore."

"I say—a polo player and not going to hunt?" said Sir Bertram incredulously.

"It's my brother who plays polo. And didn't Mr. Holme explain? About how I wanted to do research work in that celebrated library of yours?"

"Nunny's incoherent enough when he's talking to you," said Lady Enniscrow. "When he writes, you throw up your hands. Something about polo, I remember, and about those old manuscripts the British Museum wanted Bertie's father to give them. And then there was some nonsense about King Arthur."

"I hope it isn't nonsense," said James, "because that's why I'm here. It will be terribly boring for you, and it's extremely good of you to have me—"

But other guests had drifted up and Lady Eleanor began those casual English introductions that enable a country house party to discuss sport, politics and the weather from Friday to Monday, and to forget each other, if need be, forever afterward.

"Lady Needbore, Mrs. Curvett, Mr. Harold Anthony—Mr. Anthony is in the Foreign Office—Captain Thruster, Lady Clatter—she doesn't hear very well—my daughter Niniane—"

But James Fielden heard no names after that and forgot all those which had gone before. Was it not Niniane, a king's daughter—or as some accounts had it, a water fairy—who had beguiled from the mighty Merlin the secret of his magic and imprisoned Arthur's bard and soothsayer for all time living in a rocky tomb? To hear the name seemed a good omen for his quest. But it was not his quest that was uppermost in James Fielden's mind.

An impenetrable shyness had divided him from girls in his youth. In its adult guise of superiority it had continued to hold women at arm's length. He had never been inoculated against femininity and could not now withstand a massive dose. Not that he would have admitted the metaphor in connection with the Lady Niniane. Though in her evening slippers, she was almost as tall as James Fielden, and produced an effect of such latent vitality as to make that young scholar feel suddenly anemic, her long-limbed figure with its melting curves was to become now and forever his standard in these delicate matters. Nor was there anything sandy about her, nor windblown. She was all gold, that warm and glowing gold of the positive blonde. There were golden glints in the depths of her green eyes, as of hidden treasure, Mr. Fielden thought. But this may have been because he gazed so long and deeply into them. They were certainly merry and mocking depths, discouraging to springboard technique, had he possessed any.

II.

But Mr. Fielden possessed none. The waters of fate, he felt, had closed over his head for the first and last time. They were still roaring faintly in his ears as he went in to dinner. He found himself at his hostess' left. Across the narrow table, but one place farther removed, sat her daughter, her pearly shoulders reflected by its four-hundred-year-old patina. On Lady Enniscrow's

right, beside Lady Niniane and making the most of his advantage, was a dark, smoothly handsome young man of consciously athletic appearance. He looked, unathletic Mr. Fielden thought, like the self-confessed hope of his side. And that, it turned out, was just what he was.

"It was really charming of you to come, Mr. Brawne," Lady Enniscrow was saying, "when England has that match on next week in Paris. Shouldn't you be practicing or something?"

"Dear lady, I should indeed. But there are things more important even than humbling the proud Gaul," said this highly mannered young man in a tone rich with gallantry. Lady Enniscrow, a practiced hostess, recognized her cue.

"Patriotism isn't enough then? But what things? Could the middle-aged mother of children be expected to know them?"

But Niniane broke in swiftly to interrupt the tender confidence so obviously on its way.

"Why, of course, mother, can't you see? Gerald means that what is more important than beating the French just now is not to beat them. Didn't I read that they were worried about the *entente cordiale*, or are trying to keep up public confidence in the franc, or something? And, of course, the Foreign Office wouldn't like Gerald to make them feel any worse."

"I have often heard," said James, "that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. But I had no idea Downing Street obtained its victories on the tennis courts of Wimbledon."

"Why, of course. It's practically become a branch of the Foreign Office, only the examinations are different. Of course, when Gerald tours the empire they second him to the Dominions Office, and when he plays at home he's under the Home Office. They did that," she explained gravely to James, "because last year he almost let the public-parks champion beat him and the *Daily Mail* said it was an encouragement to communism. So you see," she concluded, "that's what Gerald means when he says there are things more important than beating the French."

"Point, game and set," acknowledged young Mr. Brawne. "To love—" he added forgivingly.

"You see, he's only been playing a game with me," said his tormentor pathetically. "Watch him twist his mustachios and sneer. A maiden's curse on you, sir." While Mr. Brawne giggled ecstatically, she turned her disturbing eyes on James Fielden. "Perhaps Mr. Fielden can give you some practice, Gerald. You play tennis, of course, Mr. Fielden?"

"I'm afraid I'm not much good at games," James apologized.

"Games! He thinks tennis is only a game," she marveled. "Don't go on, Mr. Fielden. Gerald is a little young yet to hear the facts of life."

"But I thought," said Mrs. Curvett, "you Americans took your sports so seriously."

"Games, perhaps," said James. "But if you want to know which race takes its sports seriously, come up to my bedroom."

The Lady Niniane giggled. "He's not trying to be ribald, Mrs. Curvett. In the museum."

"Ah, yes, the general's room. It is a bit grim," said Mrs. Curvett. "But surely you hunt, Mr. Fielden?"

"I know what you mean," said James. "You mean, do I hunt foxes? The last time I did that was fifteen years ago on my uncle's farm in Virginia. I used to shoot them with a .22."

"You used to shoot them!" said Niniane, with a shock not entirely simulated, as Lady Enniscrow gasped and Mr. Brawne looked startled. "I wonder what our husband and father, the M. F. H., would think of that!"

"Would Sir Bertram not like it?" asked James.

His disclosure had temporarily paralyzed conversation at their end of the table. In the lull Sir Bertram had heard his name mentioned.

"Eh, what's that?" he asked.

"Don't tell him," whispered Niniane, but James could see no reason to take the admonition seriously.

"Your daughter asked me if I liked fox hunting, and I merely remarked that I used to shoot them. That's all," he said.

"Shoot foxes, did you say? Shoot foxes! Good God!" was all Sir Bertram could find to say. But the veins swelled alarmingly on his forehead. He lifted his glass and then set it down again without drinking. "Shoot fo—" He took up his glass once more and drained it at a gulp. A murmur of horror ran around the table.

Lady Clatter, interrupted in the full flight of some highly audible confidences about a recent operation, asked "What's that? What's that?" This good lady had so long lifted her eyebrows over the way the world was going that they had permanently retreated into the region of eternal snows. When informed by an embarrassed neighbor of James's wrong-doing she remarked "What a barbarian!" in a tone heard around the whole table.

James attempted a light laugh, but it was an unconvincing effort. "Oh, I suppose it seems a little unusual to you here," he remarked in a tone meant to be mollifying. "As a matter of fact, we ride to hounds in America too. My brother is quite good at it. I was only a youngster, of course. But does it matter very much?"

General Scarrett broke in. He had been swelling so visibly during James' explanation that it was obvious that either he or his feelings must explode. It had been the general's boast that he had had hundreds of men shot under him, but never a horse. Only second to his conviction that the only way to fight a war was on horseback was his belief that it was the only way to hunt a fox.

"Matter, sir? Of course it matters," said General Scarrett. "It's not sporting to shoot a fox. It's simply not done, sir. I would as soon shoot my grandmother." His voice failed him. Indignation seemed to be registered in every eye but Niniane's. In hers there was a look of light mockery.

James Fielden felt half amused, half nettled, at the seriousness with which these privileged adult children of an old and mighty race regarded a matter of so little

importance. He became judicial, indulgent, a little professional.

"I never met your grandmother, of course," he said to General Scarrett, "but I'm sure you do her an injustice. I used to shoot foxes. You hunt them with horses and dogs. You've got to kill your foxes in a certain way or it's not kosher, as the Jews would say."

"Jews? Kosher?" snorted Sir Bertram. "Young man, do you know that you are talking about the most English thing in England? What, if I may ask, have the Jews to do with fox hunting? Stuff and nonsense."

"Probably," agreed James soothingly. "Of course, I know fox hunting isn't really a matter of religion with you. It's a matter of taste. I shoot foxes. You hunt them on horseback and let dogs kill them for you. For that matter, take the horses and dogs. You keep them as pets. But the Chinese, who are a much older race, eat dogs, and the French, who are more cultured, eat horses. Again, a difference of taste. Or take yourselves. Fifteen hundred years ago you English used to stain yourselves blue. Now you like to lie out on some beach and burn yourselves red. Taste again."

Sir Bertram's countenance, as James finished this little homily, appeared to indicate that he had been lying out on some very hot beach indeed. Lady Enniscrow, gauging her spouse's blood pressure with a practiced eye, thought it time to intervene.

"Talking about tastes, perhaps you like golf, Mr. Fielden," she said hurriedly. "You Americans are so wonderful at golf, aren't you? We have a very good course near here, really a championship course, and we could drive you over tomorrow—"

"I'm sorry, Lady Enniscrow," said James, "but I am no golfer. I am saving it for my next incarnation."

"It's my guess next," said Lady Niniane, "perhaps Mr. Fielden is just a trout fisher out of season."

"No," replied James. "It may sound over-squeamish, but not for many years have I been able to relish the thought of sticking a barbed hook lengthwise through a worm."

"A worm?" said Mr. Brawne. "I'm not a fisherman myself, but—a worm!"

"Don't tell father, Mr. Fielden," pleaded Niniane. think he's had enough."

"As a sportsman," said Mr. Brawne, falling into line, "I fear your methods would be too coldly logical for him."

"I don't claim to be a sportsman," said James stiffly.

"But if you're not a sportsman, and you don't play games—" said Mr. Brawne helplessly. "I mean to say, how do you keep fit, to put it on the lowest ground?"

"I drink a pint of hot water every morning," said James seriously. "Then I lie on my right side and practice Yoga."

"Very interesting, I'm sure," said Mr. Brawne coldly, "but I was referring to sport, not religion."

"Well, you see," James explained brightly, "some people make a religion of sport, so I decided to make a sport of religion."

"But I thought," interposed Lady Enniscrow hurriedly, "that one practiced Yoga in a sitting position."

"I tried that," said James, "but I could never get up afterward."

Mr. Brawne's snort at this confession of weakness was no more disapproving than the cold silence maintained by all others who had heard it. During the remainder of the meal and the rest of the evening James was permitted to feel like an outsider who had somehow got his foot across the doorstep. He felt exasperated, discomfited and regretful when he ascended to his room. Exasperated that—what was Bernard Shaw's name for it?—Horsebadk Hall should take its little games so seriously. So did his brother, perhaps, but he wouldn't mind your joking about it. Discomfited because he was depending on these people for hospitality and he seemed to have offended them. Regretful because the first woman on whom he had ever desired to make an impression was obviously the last on whom he could hope to do so. No one, he supposed, who couldn't sit a horse or pursue a ball or a fox could hope to cut an impressive figure in the eyes of a girl so adept at all of these things.

He hadn't wasted his time; he had been too busy doing something more important to learn how to chase balls or beasts. He had even acquired distinction in his chosen field, but it obviously counted for less than nothing here. "Perhaps I should have been a warthog hunter," he growled. The repulsive specimen of the genus on the wall, grinning evilly in the flickering light cast by a pleasant open fire, so exasperated him that he tried to throw a bedspread over its evil face.

"Missed, of course," he said peevishly as he retrieved the bedspread from the fireplace. Well, after all, he had not come to Enniscrow Castle to waste his time and affections on someone who, however desirable, was obviously not of his kind, nor he of hers. Tomorrow he would set to work, the work that he could do so well, that was so much more thrilling and important than all this killing of time and animals.

Awakening in this same mood of determination, he thumbed his nose at the warthog, dressed briskly and was fortunate enough to find Lady Enniscrow alone in the breakfast room and to explain to her what he wanted. The library, it seemed, was in the old west wing of the castle. It was catalogued except for the oldest portion, of which the catalogue was lost. Bertie would have been quite willing to give the museum what the museum wanted from it, but his grandfather, who, it seemed, hated all governments, had made it part of the entail. There was also, she added with a laugh, supposed to be a curse or a secret or something in connection with the library. But it had not prevented experts from looking over it from time to time and she thought that they must have noted everything of value.

James Fielden's soul sank within him. He had hoped this would prove virgin material. But there was always the chance, he thought, as he followed a footman down echoing corridors to the west wing, that those who had been before him might have missed something.

That seemed more likely when they reached the library, a huge, circular room, with stone walls and pointed, vaulted wooden ceiling, that was really a separate wing in itself. The cathedral light admitted by its high and narrow windows left in darkness five deep bays or recesses which, James Fielden remembered, found their counterpart in the flying buttresses which sustained the library without. And everywhere there were books. The older ones, his guide informed him, were to be found in the recesses and there, too, were many manuscripts in tin boxes to protect them from the damp that seeped, even through those solid, four-foot walls, from the clustering ivy outside.

The footman bowed and left him. James Fielden got to work. There were five recesses. Where a sixth one might have been expected, there was, surprisingly, what seemed like a huge stone, roughly oblong, its front adorned by a statute carved in three-quarter relief. The figure might have been that of a Welsh bard, was at any rate that of an old man in flowing garments with long hair and beard. The attitude was curious. The left hand veiled the downcast eyes as though their owner were lost in a dream. The right was flung high as though in warning to him who should seek to distrub that slumber. The chiseling was rough but powerful. The statue and the tomblike stone seemed to be more ancient even than the library itself, which, Lady Enniscrow had said, was reputed once to have been a chapel and was older than the Norman Conquest.

Here, James thought, was to be found the origin of the "curse or secret or something" with which legend had haunted the library. But it was not the riddle he had come to solve. He began methodically to examine the contents of the first recess.

Hours later he was roused, with a start, from his researches. It was his friend, the footman, with information. "The 'unt isn't back, sir, but her ladyship left word that lunch was to be served at 1:30 for those as wanted it."

"James—no, that's my own name—I mean George," said James Fielden. "Would it be not cricket, or even something definitely criminal, like shooting a fox, if you brought me a sandwich and a glass of buttermilk, and let me get on with my work?"

"No sir, not at all, sir," said James or George with a grin. "There's only a few for lunch hennyway, sir. There's Lady Clatter—her ladyship is a bit 'ard of 'earing, if you remember—and General Scarrett, that's too old to 'unt, and Mr. 'Astings, that can't because he has a broken collarbone, and the curate that came to see her ladyship about the carpenter threatenin' to vote socialist, only she's 'unting too."

"And so am I," said James. "Hunting for truth and not finding it. Trying to make the dead past give up its dead."

George shuddered slightly. "I don't like to 'ear you talk that way, sir. This place halways gives me the creeps hennyway."

"Haunted?"

"No, sir, not exactly. It's the feeling it gives you. Like a tomb, somehow. And I never go into it but I feel there's somebody here, like. The maids say the same. They won't go into the place alone, at least not after dark. 'Aven't you noticed it?"

Yes, James Fielden thought, as he ate his sandwiches, he had noticed it. A feeling that there was somebody there. His passion for history had always made the oldest and dustiest chronicle come alive as he read it. But this was different. This room felt as though it were haunted by the emanation of another brain, not merely peopled by his own. Not something malign and watching. More something blind and thwarted and brooding.

But perhaps he was merely investing the place with his own mood. Not that he was blind now; he knew at last that what he wanted in life was the Lady Niniane, but the price of vision was the realization of its hopelessness. He recalled with a wry smile the sense of scholarly superiority that had sustained him in his dealings with his fellow men; how futile and insubstantial an air to *amour propre* it seemed in this emergency. The lovely Lady Niniane was a wife for a hero. He was only an unheroic figure who had with ridiculous inappropriateness elected to make himself an authority on a heroic age. A weakling pathetically studying the deeds of strong men.

III.

Well, it was too late now to change. Better to get on with his work and rid Enniscrow Castle as soon as possible of its incongruous guest. In the five recesses there were perhaps two hundred volumes and a wealth of manuscripts. These, working with expert care and swiftness, he had narrowed down to a dozen which bore on the object of his quest. There were copies, earlier than any James had ever seen, of the works of that intriguing bishop-historian, Giraldus Cambrensis. There was a brilliantly illuminated missal containing an old and detailed account of the legend of St. Padarn. There was a very ancient copy of *De Excidio Britanniae* executed in Cymric by a monkish hand on time-defying parchment, but fifteen minutes sufficed to show that, like the English translation which James had already seen, it mystifyingly made no mention of King Arthur or his kingdom. A tenth-century collection of the utterances of the Cymric bards, oracular and obscure though these minor prophets always took care to be, promised well, but on examination proved disappointing. And now James Fielden had come almost to the end of his search, and with nothing of value to show for it. There remained in the last recess only a bronze chest, massive and antique, which might, he thought, contain some manuscript of special value. It was green with verdigris, and so much effort was required to turn its huge key that he thought the task would be beyond his strength. But at last the lock clicked open and with a clang that resounded through the room he threw back the top. The chest was empty.

James Fielden felt an almost physical pang of disap-

pointment. The chest had been his last chance. It had, in its age and massiveness, seemed so likely a container of last chances and it had failed him. Strange that it should be empty. If it had held something of value, why and where had it been transferred? If not, why was the coffer here in this storehouse of records? And besides, James Fielden had the illogical, obviously baseless but persistent feeling that there *was* something in it.

He examined it with care. Bottom and sides yielded nothing. But inside the lid was there not, faintly visible, something that looked like an inscription, something—Yes, by gosh, it was an inscription and in ancient Cymric, too. A Cymric inscription inside a Roman coffer! That was interesting, though, for that matter, the Romans must have left behind much besides walled towns, paved roads and aqueducts when they fled back to the heart of their threatened empire.

Now James Fielden, who could not ride a horse or hit a ball, could read Cymric, which is just the oldest kind of Welsh. This is what he read, the translation being his own:

If chest or tomb doth empty seem
Who knoweth if or not, or why?
Till Fate wills, let their secrets lie.
Warned be the mortal that shall pry
To wake the Mighty from his dream.

James Fielden ran his dusty fingers through his rumpled hair. Mighty intriguing, all this, but puzzling too. *"If chest or tomb—"* Well, this was the chest. And the tomb? "Like a tomb, somehow," had said the footman. Tomb, tomb—why, of course, that must be the tomb, that huge piece of living rock in the sixth recess.

Eagerly he examined it. But nowhere, top or bottom or sides, did he find any crack or cranny which would indicate that this was not what it seemed, solid stone. He tapped it with a heavy poker. No hollowness, he could swear.

He re-examined the bronze coffer. It was four feet long, three feet wide, and three feet deep. Its top, front and back were bare of ornament. On each of its two ends was depicted, in half relief, what seemed a representation of the rising sun, with diverging rays. In the center of each disk was a heavy bronze handle. James measured the coffer, inside and out, bottom and sides. The measurements corresponded. Since the coffer was an inch thick everywhere, however, that did not rule out the possibility of a false bottom, or hollow sides. With a careful eye and probing finger he examined every inch of its surface. He found neither crevice, lever, button nor other apparent means of operating a secret panel. He tried pulling and twisting the two rings. They did not move. That left nothing. No, it did leave one thing—the lock.

James closed the lid of the coffer and tried locking and unlocking it. All seemed normal. He threw back the lid and repeated the operation. Oh, oh, that felt different somehow. What was the difference? There was none when he turned the key to the left, as he would ordinarily have done to unlock the coffer. But when he turned it to the right it seemed—yes, it did turn an inch farther than if the lid were down and in process of being locked. Eagerly James jiggled the massive key back and forth, shook and kicked the coffer. Nothing happened.

He was sure he had taken one step in the right direction. It must be some simple form of combination—something else must be pulled or twisted at the same time. If so, that something else could only be the handles. James tried twisting the right-hand handle while holding the key in its extreme rightward position. Nothing happened. He twisted the left handle and, with a clatter, the bronze disk of the rising sun to which the handle was attached came away from its rays and fell to the floor. What it had hidden was a shallow compartment. In the compartment was a single sheet of parchment.

James Fielden's fingers trembled with excitement as he took the piece of ancient, crackling parchment from its hidden place of centuries. It also was in Cymric, but the oldest form of it that James had ever seen. The parchment, he knew, must be fourteen or fifteen centuries old. Under the dust and corrosion of the years its message, inscribed in a shaky, spidery hand like that of an old woman, was only faintly visible. But James could read it.

What he read was a Druidic incantation, a formula for the conjuration of mighty natural and demonic forces to insure that the luckless victim on whom it was worked should:

". . . lie for always in a waking dream,
Entombed forever in the living rock."

More than that, the world will never know about it textually, since James Fielden, for reasons that will be obvious, would never publish it, even in safely scientific

journals of limited and erudite circulation. For, as everyone knows, there are jealousies even in scientific circles, and who would willingly subject a resentful controversialist to the temptation to silence his antagonist forever?

There was a peculiar, hypnotic quality about the runes, and yet, as he read and reread them, James detected also a certain force and tortuous use of words for which he could not account. It was like a conundrum . . . a conundrum . . . no, not a conundrum, an anagram!

"Yes, it's an anagram," said James. "You recite it backwards and undo the charm. Here goes." And with no thought except to give proper effect to the direful words, he raised a hand over his head and declaimed them in the most sonorous voice he could muster.

What followed took place so quickly and with such elemental violence that James could never be quite sure what did happen. He had an instant impression of the library being filled with "a sort of roaring darkness" as he expressed it. Storm and avalanche and earthquake and volcano seemed to rage against each other in deafening anarchy. His ears were assailed by sounds like the raving of whirlwinds, screams of anguish and the howling of wolves. The darkness was split by a blinding flash of lightning, there was a shattering crash as of thunder—and all was still again. All was still. But the rocky tomb in the sixth recess lay in fragments on the floor and James Fielden's reeling senses reeled again as he saw the statue that had garnished it standing before him in the form of an aged man of awing appearance who, except that he lacked a scythe, might have been Father Time himself.

James closed his eyes, shook his head and pinched himself. He opened his eyes. The awe-inspiring apparition was still there.

"Who the devil are you?" he asked.

"I am Merlin," replied the sage.

He spoke in English, which did not surprise James at the time. Neither, when he knew more about Merlin's powers, did it surprise him later.

"Not Merlin, bard and magician of Arthur's time?" he asked incredulously. All this, he knew, was only a dream, but even in a dream, he thought, a scholar should take nothing for granted.

A look of pleasure crossed the severe features of his companion. "Yes, Merlin, counselor to Vortigern and Uther-Pendragon and later to the holy Arthur," he said. "But that was long ago, and even in my dreams I have been aware that much was changed in the world. Were I not above human weakness I should find it pleasing to discover my name and fame still so pat upon men's lips."

"The world knows a great deal less about you than it would like," said James. "You speak, for instance, of your dreams. Can it possibly be true, then, what we know only by legend, that you were bewitched by Niniane, a king's daughter, with one of your own spells?"

'Strange that you should ask, who have released me from it," said Merlin with a frown. "Yes, Niniane it was. The shameless hussy cozened the spell from me with much asking, on the plea that she would use it on her stepmother, who had looked with little favor on our —association. I was far removed from human deceits and suspected naught. Sorcery I could cope with, and the power of kings. But—it is difficult to explain—the wench had something in her eyes—" He paused.

"Don't explain," said James. "I know a wench of the same description and she also has something in her eyes. She is a daughter of this house. Her name—as it happens—is also Niniane."

Merlin started violently. His brows contracted and lightning flashed from under them. "Niniane, did you say? And of this house? Spawn must she be of the same evil breed. This day I shall destroy her and all her kind. Ah, Niniane, daughter of Gwledigau! It has been a long rendezvous with vengeance, but Merlin has kept it." He raised one trembling hand in the air and appeared on the point of beginning one of those mighty conjurations whose efficacy James had seen so overwhelmingly demonstrated.

"One moment," said James hastily. "Before you begin I had better tell you that although it is true that the daughter of this house is called Niniane, it is also written in the books of heraldry that her family is descended from the mighty Merlin."

/"Ha, what do you say?" replied the sage. "From Merlin? In sooth, young man, that puts a different light on the matter. Mm-m-m. It is true I was fourscore and ten at the time, but as you will understand, far above human limitations." He stroked his beard reminiscently. "Ah, well, young blood, young blood. Immune from the pettiness of mortals, Merlin knows how to be magnanimous and will forgive."

"I'm glad to hear it," said James.

"But Merlin knows how to be grateful, too. It is long since I exercised my powers, but I have no doubt that they will suffice for any common boon. What would you have? A principality? A thousand fighting men? The favor of your king's wife? The hand of a king's daughter?"

"None of these things," replied James hastily. "Glad to have been of service. I don't ask anything at all. Except perhaps a little information. Was Arthur's kingdom in Cornwall or was it in Wales? Did you really bring Stonehenge from Ireland? These stories about Guinevere, now—were they—"

"As for Arthur's kingdom," answered Merlin, "the whole world knows that it extended over Wales and Cornwall both. And farther, too. With my cunning I contrived it so. Stonehenge? Yes, that was a little feat of magic I did to amuse the court. The Irish resented it, as they were using the stones at the time as a foundation for their king's palace. But, then, you couldn't please them. As for Guinevere—ah, well. She was a beautiful, proud woman, and Arthur was ever too much immersed in affairs of state when he might well have left them to me. It was only to be expected. There were—ah, sober, solid men about the court who would have been glad to console her discreetly, but she took an un-

accountable fancy to that sprig Lancelot, a brawling meddlesome fellow who used to go around the country righting wrongs, as he called it. A maiden would come to court with a tale about some man. Before she could get the words out of her mouth, Lancelot would be off o kill the fellow who might have had provocation enough, for all he knew. In any case there was the maiden, still wronged, and with the man no longer alive who might have put it right. But we waste time. Never mortal yet but had some wish to gratify. Search your heart. Do you crave love? Distinction? Merlin will grant them."

A wild idea coursed through James Fielden's brain. This, of course, was only a singularly vivid dream, but being in dreamland, why not do as the dreamers do? Why not be honest? He loved Niniane, and the only kind of distinction he valued was that which would lend him favor in her eyes.

"Well," he admitted, "now that you mention it, there is something you could do for me. This girl Niniane, your many-times-great-granddaughter. As it happens, I love her. But, as it happens, she is young and has been taught to value skill in various games and sports which are today what skill with sword and lance was in your time. Is there such a thing as a talisman which would repair my awkwardness in these matters? And, while we are about it, have you a specific charm which would capture the maiden's affections?"

An indulgent smile crossed Merlin's features. "Such boons were the commonplaces of my apprentice days," he said. "Full many a magic sword and spear have I supplied, and a hundred of our British beauties owed their surrender to charms of mine. It is true," he added thoughtfully, "that I never found charm yet that would insure that a woman's affections, once granted, would remain constant. There was Yguerne, wife of the Duke of Cornwall—but that is another story. Take this ring. I know naught of these games and sports you speak of, but while you wear it you will win all games or contests you enter. All will be possible for you. Take this parchment. You have but to pronounce what is inscribed thereon, and the love of the woman you desire will be yours, whether she be maid or wedded wife."

"It's very good of you," said James.

"And now," said Merlin, "it is time, Mortal, for me to take my leave."

"Where do you intend to go?" asked James curiously.

"During the last two hundred years of my dream," replied Merlin, "a Yogi who lives and meditates in a cave in the mountains of Tibet was in astral communication with me. He invited me to visit him after my disenchantment, which he predicted. I go now. Fortune be with you."

IV.

And, with complete suddenness, the library was empty. Empty, yes, but on the floor still lay the shattered fragments of Merlin's tomb. Dazed, James looked down at the curiously chased ring of soft, pure gold, that adorned his finger, and the little fragment of parchment in his hand. And then there came a knock at the door.

George, the footman, entered. "Her ladyship," he began, "thought I ought to remind you—" And then his eye caught the chaos on the floor, and he broke off in amazement. "Coo, sir," he said, "we thought it was a clap of thunder. Not as there was a cloud in the sky. But it must 'a' been this here, we heard. What happened, sir?"

"It fell apart," said James truthfully. "While I was working at the books."

"Must 'a' been a bit of a shock, sir."

"It was," said James, "so much so that I could use a good, stiff whisky right now."

"There's a tray in the 'all, sir, with everything you need. I just put it there."

With his head already in a whirl, James helped himself to two inordinately stiff drinks, which did nothing to compose it. As he dressed with fumbling fingers, he tried to rationalize the disordered record of the afternoon. It couldn't have been a dream, because there in the library was the shattered tomb, and here in his bedroom were the ring and scroll. Could he have found them in the coffer, been dazed by a blow from one of the rock fragments—exploded in some mysterious manner—and then imagined the rest? Could he—well, there was one way of finding out. "Games and contests you will win. All will be possible to you." But he couldn't play games or sports in his bedroom—

And then his eye fell on the bow with its brood of steel-tipped arrows, there on the wall underneath the boomerangs and the assegais. Wasn't archery a recognized sport, even in Merlin's time? A target? His eye fell on the repulsive features of the warthog. "Old boy," said James Fielden, "this is where you get yours."

As he strung the bow and pulled an arrow to its length, he felt a sense of power and sureness flow into him and mingle with the whisky. Something difficult, now—something worthy of his skill. Say the left nostril.

With a whizz the arrow flew through the air and buried itself exactly in the center of its objective. Another arrow—the right nostril. *Whizz!* The right ear—*whizz!* The left ear—*whizz!* Its right eye—but James had run out of arrows and the mellow notes of a gong floated up from below with its promise of dinner. Should he remove the arrows? "Doggone it, you look better that way," was his conclusion. "Like a pincushion in a nightmare," was his parting shot as he walked gravely downstairs, rejecting a wayward impulse to try the banister.

He found his fellow guests discussing over cocktails what had evidently been a satisfactory day's hunting.

"We found in Pool Tai, turned lefthanded at Carnage Withyhead, and killed back of Spook Spinney," Sir Bertram was explaining to General Scarrett.

"Your daughters may have your seat," Captain Thruster was maintaining gallantly to the plump but energetic Lady Needbore, "but they'll never have your hands."

Lady Needbore turned to James.

"The man's flattering me," she said.

"Not at all," said James politely. "I think you have very pretty hands."

Lady Needbore goggled. Niniane joined them. "I gather from your expression," she said, "that Mr. Fielden has been giving you some more views on hunting. Last night he said it was all a matter of taste—our bad taste was what he meant."

"I didn't," said James. "And anyway I was wrong. I've been thinking it over. It's not kosher. It's totemism. You've got to kill certain animals in a certain way. The North American Indians used to do it, though they never insisted on a ceremonial costume. If you kill them any other way it's a sin and the animal will haunt you. I should have recognized it. I was wrong."

"Charming of you," said Lady Needbore.

"It seems to make everything all right," said Captain Thruster.

"We're not silly—we're just savages," said Niniane.

"Better than being sissies," James replied agreeably. "I'm thinking of taking up hunting myself."

"Why not tennis?" asked Gerald Brawne, who had drifted to Niniane's side.

"I might play you tomorrow if it's fine," said James.

Mr. Brawne smiled. "It will have to be in the morning then, because I'm going to turn heretic in the afternoon. Golf. Pavlicek, your open champion, is going to play an exhibition against Flammenwerfer—you know, the new German pro who's beaten everybody in Europe?"

"They say it's because he's afraid to lose," said Captain Thruster. "You know—concentrate or concentration camp."

"And we're all driving over to Putting-on-Stones tomorrow to see it," said Niniane.

"I'll go along," said James amiably.

At dinner he found himself sitting beside Niniane. This was a good fortune he had not expected. "Delilah turned censor over the *enfant terrible*," he thought. But the unprecedented combination of Dutch and Welsh courage that fermented within him lent him a unique audacity. James Fielden began to talk. He held Niniane with his glittering eye. He took complete charge of her and the conversation. He talked amply, discriminatingly, but with vigor and animation. His theme was man, strange offspring of cannibal Mother Nature, who had stumbled by accident, when she was not looking, on a terrible weapon called reason. With it, he had grown stronger than Nature, ravished her, enslaved her, and was reaching out for the universe. He was already greater than the universe, for the universe existed only in his mind. He was the real creator. Out of earth and water he had created a world; he had peopled the sky with suns and planets; he was beginning to set bounds to the cosmos.

The story of man, said James, was the story of everything. His story was history. Of savagery and civilization he now talked, and of how the growth of knowledge had not been matched by the growth of wisdom. He talked of nations and he talked of peoples. He talked of little England and its great story, of the Celts and the Romans and the Saxons. Inevitably he came at last to the misty but enchanting legend of Arthur, or Arthur's kingdom and his theory of it.

"I have talked too much," he said, "but this part of it should have a special interest for you."

"Oh, I know. Our reputed descent from Merlin and all that sort of thing. But of course we don't take it seriously."

"You should," said James, "because I have good reason to believe it's true. Descended not only from Merlin; but from Niniane, who enchanted him with one of his own spells. One story is that she was a king's daughter. Another is that she was a water fairy. I forgot to ask—that is, I have not been able to find out which. But when I look at her descendant I find either hypothesis credible."

"For a scholar, you pay very pretty compliments. But is that why you came to Enniscrow Castle? To prove that my ancestors were no better than they should be?"

"No, it was to establish a theory of mine that King Arthur ruled in Cornwall and not only in Wales, as everybody else believes."

"And have you done so?" asked Niniane. She was leaning on one elbow, looking into his face, to the neglect of manners and her other dinner partner.

"I think so," said James.

"How splendid to have got what you wanted. You must be very happy."

"Not very happy," said James. "Not happy at all. You see, I found out at the same time that it was not what I really wanted."

"No-o?" said Niniane with surprise.

you really want, then?"

"What all men want sooner or later. Love."

"And did you have to come to Castle Enniscrow to find that out?" asked Niniane smilingly.

"Yes," said James quietly.

"Let us hope that you will be successful in both quests," said Niniane. The tone was light, but something in James Fielden's voice and eyes had faintly flushed her cheek. Opportunely came the sudden scraping of chairs that meant the men were to be left to their port.

Did she avoid him after dinner? James, suddenly conscious that he had been guilty not only of verbal hemorrhage in general, but the more specific crime of serious conversation at the dinner table, was only too ready to think so. In the grip of such gloomy reflections, he allowed himself to be coerced by Lady Enniscrow into making a bridge fourth. When her further explanations stung him into recollection of the slimness of his theoretical qualifications for the game, and the unvaryingly humiliating character of his experiments in its practice, it was too late to retreat.

"You will enjoy it," said Lady Enniscrow. "Captain Thruster is one of our bridge authorities in England. Some people think Mrs. Curvett is almost as good. General Scarrett's game is a little old-fashioned, but

frightfully sound. And I suppose you are very good yourself, like most Americans."

James was about to undeceive her when he remembered Merlin's promise. Wasn't bridge a game?

"I can't say," he said cautiously. "I may be very good and I may be terrible. I never know."

With a smile for this disarming modesty, Lady Enniscrow left the four to their devices. James drew Mrs. Curvett against Captain Thruster and General Scarrett.

"What conventions, partner?" asked that vivacious brunette.

"My game is entirely unconventional," said James.

Mrs. Curvett smiled politely. "Yes, but I mean what system. Culbertson?"

"The Merlin system," said James.

"I never heard of it."

"It's very complicated. No use trying to explain it now. Just bid as you see fit and leave the rest to me."

Mrs. Curvett stared, Captain Thruster looked dumfounded, General Scarrett barely repressed a snort. The game commenced.

The moment James picked up his hand, he knew the charm was working. He felt his brain grow exact, precise and clear. It felt like a machine, like one of those marvelous indexing machines he had seen in archives and libraries. As he stared at the cards in his hand they became so many mathematical symbols of the working of the great law of chance. He seemed instantly to recognize their pattern and to divine that of the other three hands. He felt his face harden into imperturbability thinly masking—cunning. Into his brain leaped an anguished distrust of his partner, and a conviction that she would let him down. In short, he felt like a good bridge player.

Mrs. Curvett, who had dealt, passed. General Scarrett passed. James, with five tricks in his hand, also passed. When the hand were thrown in, Mrs. Curvett asked with astonishment: "But why didn't you bid, partner?"

"Because of the distribution. All the spades in General Scarrett's hand, all the hearts in Captain Thruster's and even the diamonds, wouldn't have broken," said James.

"But how on earth did you know all that?" asked Captain Thruster.

"Ah, that's the advantage of the Merlin system," said James.

"I'm glad you haven't had time to explain it to Mrs. Curvett," said Captain Thruster, "but I hope you'll explain it later to me."

General Scarrett, who dealt the next hand, promptly called "Two hearts." James, who had drawn the king, jack, ten, seven, six and four of spades, the nine, eight, four and three of hearts, no diamonds, and the ace, king and queen of clubs said two spades. Captain Thruster said three diamonds and Mrs. Curvett passed without ceremony. Three hearts, said General Scarrett. James called out three spades, followed by four hearts from Captain Thruster, and another pass by Mrs. Curvett.

"Five diamonds," was General Scarrett's next bid.

"Five spades," said James with defiance and, when six hearts was bid against him, he apparently threw caution to the winds and bid six spades.

"Double," snapped General Scarrett, angered at this futile obstinacy.

"Redouble," was James' reply. Captain Thruster led the ten of hearts and, with a look of despair, Mrs. Curvett laid on the table an absolute Yarborough.

James trumped Captain Thruster's ten of hearts, and led a club, making the AKQ in his own hand. Then he trumped another heart and led the first of his remaining three clubs from dummy. General Scarrett, after long consideration, trumped with the nine of spades. James overtrumped and entered dummy with another heart. On the next club led, General Scarrett in desperation trumped with the ace of spades and led his king of diamonds. James trumped it in his own hand, trumped his third heart in dummy with his remaining spade, and the lead of dummy's last club made General Scarrett's situation hopeless.

"Six tricks in our combined hands and a little slam is made against us," he said in disgust as he threw down his cards.

"When you kept on bidding and I looked at my perfect Yarborough I thought one of us must be seeing things," said Mrs. Curvett.

"I knew your hand would be good for four tricks in spades," said James.

This was more than General Scarrett could bear. "I am ready to believe in miracles, sir," he said, "but if you knew all this, why did you take so long to get up to your little slam?"

"Because if I had gone up quickly you might not have doubled me," said James logically.

General Scarrett's countenance glowed with all the stored-up heat of a thousand chutneys, curries and blazing Indian suns, and it was with a trembling hand that he picked up the cards that James now dealt him. One glance showed James that he had a probable little slam in hearts, for he had ten hearts with all the honors, the ace, queen of clubs, and the six of spades. But cards so unbalanced suggested similar possibilities in the other hands, and so it proved. Over James' attempted shut-out bid of six hearts, Captain Thruster immediately bid six spades, and General Scarrett, having no hearts and the ace of diamonds, triumphantly said seven hearts. When Captain Thruster bid seven spades, however, James in his turn bid seven hearts.

"It's an underbid," said Captain Thruster. "You must bid eight hearts."

"But that's impossible," said Mrs. Curvett.

"It's obligatory under the rules," said Captain Thruster.

James promptly bid eight hearts and was doubled.

"Suppose I can't redouble?" he asked.

"No," said Captain Thruster.

"Too bad," he commented regretfully.

Captain Thruster led the ace of spades, and Mrs. Curvett, with a stricken face, laid down what is called in

better bridge circles an absolute bust. But there was one welcome card in it—the nine of hearts.

Captain Thruster, having won his ace, led the king of spades which James trumped. He then entered dummy by playing a small heart to the nine there, led a club and finessed his queen. He could now have laid down his hand, but instead one after another he played out five hearts. Captain Thruster threw away spades and General Scarrett clubs. Then James suddenly shifted to his ace of clubs. Captain Thruster and dummy followed suit and General Scarrett discarded a diamond.

"Having no clubs, partner?" asked Captain Thruster.

"No clubs," said the general.

James then laid down his hand.

"It takes twelve tricks, and General Scarrett has revoked by not playing his two of clubs on my ace," he said. "He had it tucked in with his spades. Two tricks for the revoke gives me eight hearts, doubled, for the game and rubber."

There was a moment of paralyzed silence. Then General Scarrett, with great dignity, thrust back his chair and rose to his feet.

"Sir," he said, "I owe you nine pounds fifteen on the rubber. Here it is. In thirty years of play, sir, I have never seen any bridge like yours. There may be a place for it on the stage, among the other mystery turns. But this happens to be an English country house. And now, if you will permit, I should like to say good night."

General Scarrett retired in good order. Crestfallen, James regarded his rigid and retreating form.

"I'm sorry the general took it that way," he said. "Of course, as it happened, we had all the luck."

"I don't think it's the luck he objected to," said Captain Thruster. "By the way, I shan't ask you to explain your system after all. I'm afraid I couldn't afford to make use of it." And Captain Thruster also departed.

Only Mrs. Curvett was left. "What was wrong with my system anyway?" James asked her, aggrievedly.

Mrs. Curvett stuffed her winnings into her evening bag, delicately inserted another cigarette in a long, jade holder, and rose.

"I don't see any reason why I should complain about it myself," she said, "especially as I don't know what it is. But you will admit it's a bit bizarre."

Yes, James had to admit, his performance had been bizarre. Yet, people who set such store by games shouldn't object when they lost them. But it was the story of fox hunting all over again. You must win only in a certain way. It was not essentially that his system was unfair, for the mere existence of good bridge players, when you thought about it, was unfair to poor ones. But it was unfair in the wrong way. What would Niniane think when she heard about it? He must be more careful when next he made use of the Merlin formula.

V.

James went early to bed. The warthog, he noticed, had been deprived of his feathered embellishments. He could only speculate on the thoughts that must have crowded the brain of the housemaid who removed them.

Did she think he was insane? Or had she, perhaps, shared his feelings about the odious mask that now again stared down at him in its pristine horribleness?

Early to bed meant early to rise. James, stepping outdoors into a golden September morning, heard a *plonk, plonk, plonk,* from the tennis courts. It was Niniane and Gerald Brawne. Throwing the whole weight of her splendid young body into her shots, and covering her court with the speed of a young antelope, Niniane seemed to James to be giving her distinguished opponent an even battle. But she knew better, and at James's appearance threw down her racket.

"He never makes a mistake," she said. "But simply *never*. It's heartbreaking. You take him on, Mr. Fielden. Try your system on him. I hear you're strong on system."

"Yes, of course. You challenged me yesterday, didn't you?" said young Mr. Brawne, every wave of his dark hair as neatly in place as the pleats in his tennis trousers. "Were you pulling my leg, or are you somebody pretty good, one of those dark horses, you know?"

"More likely just a silly ass," said James. "Still I'll play you."

"Slaughter each other, please," said Niniane. "I feel like a Roman holiday."

"You serve," said young Mr. Brawne.

James had played, in all his life, perhaps half a hundred games of tennis. But when he swung Niniane's racket at his first service ball, he knew that it was not going to matter. And it did not. The racket swished down, then up and forward with such speed that Niniane's dazzled eye could not follow it. There was a terrific *plonk*. There was, in midair, a sort of explosion. And then James was dusting fragments of cloth and rubber off his face and Mr. Brawne was dazedly asking "What happened?"

"I think the ball must have burst," said James.

"'Straordinary," said young Mr. Brawne. "Take two more."

But one more was enough. This ball was made of sterner stuff. It did not burst. It merely whizzed through the air like a high-velocity shell, raised the dust in the most inaccessible corner of Mr. Brawne's forehand court, burst its way through green canvas and stop netting at the back, and was never seen again.

Young Brawne had been caught flat-footed by all these developments.

James crossed to his backhand court and served again. Again came a swish, a whizz, a patch of dust, and another yawning hole in the court surround. The face of his opponent, who had not yet succeeded in getting his racket on the ball, turned a deep red.

Poising himself like a cat, Mr. Brawne awaited the next service with an air of grim determination. It came, he leaped convulsively to the right and stabbed at it with outstretched racket. There was a splintering sound and a second later the racket, with a broken frame, was lying against the stop netting and Mr. Brawne was dazedly regarding his empty and stinging fingers.

"Sorry," said James.

Mr. Brawne looked at him. Then he looked at Niniane. With a great dignity and deliberation he helped himself to another of the three rackets without which he had not for years made his appearance on any court.

Mr. Brawne acted in this measured manner because he had not the slightest idea what to do next. As it turned out, this did not matter. Fate did it for him. For James's next service ball, rising from the ground like a bullet, hit young Mr. Brawne fairly and squarely in the midriff, drove him back a yard, and prostrated him flat on his back. Minus wind and consciousness, the rising tennis hope of Britain lay spread-eagled beneath the skies and did not move.

"When I asked you to slaughter each other," said Niniane, "I did not know you were going to take me so literally." Her face was pale.

Still paler was James as he ran for help. Young Mr. Brawne, his raven hair now falling interestingly over a pallid brow, was carried into the house. A doctor, hastily summoned, gave his verdict.

"Two broken ribs and a terrific bruise. Luckily it wasn't worse. But he won't play any more tennis this year."

"That means the Davis Cup will go to France—or America," said Captain Thruster in a flat voice. Elaborately he avoided looking at James.

"That it should have happened under my roof," mourned Sir Bertram, ignoring the fact that Mr. Brawne had been stricken under the open sky. "By Gad, sir," he said to the sheepish James, "the powers of destruction seem to be keeping a rendezvous with you. A monument stands for a thousand years unharmed in my library, but wrecks itself when you look at it. Poor Brawne plays tennis five years without a scratch and the first time he meets you gets his ribs broken."

"Perhaps Mr. Fielden doesn't know his own strength," said Mrs. Curvett.

"He can gauge it very well at bridge," said Captain Thruster.

James, looking about him, saw every well-bred countenance fixed in lines of resentment and disapproval. "What can I say?" he cried. "Except, that if I had any idea this would happen, I never would have touched a racket. But you people are all so enthusiastic about games, I thought I felt I would try to enter into the spirit of the occasion—"

"Well, you did it," said Captain Thruster; "the spirit of the occasion and very nearly the body of Mr. Brawne. Well, who's for Putting-on-Stones and golf this afternoon?"

"I am," said Niniane. "And Mr. Fielden had better come so that we can keep an eye on him. And you, Harold?"

"Yes," said the young diplomat, for it was Mr. Anthony. "Some of the German crowd may be there, and you never know when you can pick something up."

He was right. Some of the German crowd was there, including a young attache with whom Mr. Anthony entered into an animated conversation. He talked perfect German, to which the German insisted in replying in

faultless English. The German champion was there, looking Aryan enough to delight Mr. Hitler's eye with his close-cropped blond hair, his light-blue eyes, his perfectly trained figure, his look of bristling and brittle dignity. The German champion's caddie was there. He had arrived the day before and had made an intelligence map, drawn to scale, of every hole. On this his chief had charted every drive, iron, chip and putt. It merely remained to carry out this meticulous plan of campaign, and that he could do so the champion had assured himself by hours and days and weeks and months of practice. What his opponent might do, he did not allow to trouble his calculations. He had yet to meet an opponent who could do himself justice against this methodical, merciless, mathematical application of science to sport.

But the American champion was not there. Three o'clock came, but not Mr. Pavlicek. Three o'clock passed and so did the patience of Mr. Flammenwerfer and his supporters.

"Es ist unerhort," he said. "So long to wait. This American comes not and sends even no word. *Er will mich beleidigen!"*

"He says your champion is trying to insult him," said Harold Anthony. "Nazis take those things so seriously."

"Pavlicek," snorted the champion in another outburst. *"Was fur ein Amerikaner ist das! Veilleicht is er nicht sogar ein Arier."*

"Mm-m-m," said Mr. Anthony. "He says your man is a coward, and afraid to meet him."

"What nonsense," said James.

"Of course," agreed Mr. Anthony amiably. "Although, from what I hear, Flammenwerfer would be sure to win."

At the words "sure to win," a thought flashed through James' mind. "I know someone," he thought grimly, "who would be even surer to win." And what better use could he make of Merlin's gift than to exercise it for the honor of his country and the temples of its gods, especially that of the great god Golf? Resolve gripped him.

"Ask him," he said, "whether, rather than disappoint everybody, he would care to play against an American amateur."

"But man, surely you can't play his kind of golf," said Mr. Anthony.

"I'm not sure, but perhaps I can play a better kind," said James.

It was arranged. As Mr. Anthony put it, what the crowd had gathered for was to see the great Flammenwerfer play golf. Rather than disappoint them, an American amateur would deputize for his professional compatriot who, for all they knew, might have been killed or injured en route. Surely the great Flammenwerfer, in the circumstances, would not disappoint his admirers? Of course it would merely be an exhibition—

The great Flammenwerfer consented. Clubs and a caddie were found for James. The first hole was a slight dog leg, 450 yards. The German played a faultless drive just to the left of the angle of woods that made the dog leg. James took out his driver. He had played golf intermittently between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, and never since.

"By the way," he said, "these are right-handed clubs."

"Yes, sir," said his caddie. "Why?"

"I'm left-handed," said James, "but I guess it doesn't matter."

It didn't. As he swung, aiming in the general direction of the hole and leaving the rest to Merlin, James felt his body coil up into something like a stainless steel spring lubricated with honey. There was a high-pitched *swish-h*, a *crack* like the sound a bullet makes in the ear of the man whom it has just missed, a follow-through that wound James up like a corkscrew, and the ball flew like a comet over the woods.

"Man, what a drive!" said James's caddie, looking at him with respect. Even Flammenwerfer looked surprised.

His surprise, however, did not interfere with his playing a faultless high pitch that lit on the green and rolled to within two feet of the hole. And James's ball was nowhere to be seen.

But there was a shout from the spectators gathered about the green. They pointed toward the flag. James and his caddie looked at each other with a wild surmise. It was true. The ball was in the hole, a 450-yard hole in one.

"It came over the woods like a bullet, missed me by an inch and just rolled straight in," said an excited young woman with a shooting stick.

"Ah, a lady killer," murmured Niniane, who had followed the players to the green. But James thought he read admiration in her eyes.

There was none in Flammenwerfer's, who looked darkly suspicious and muttered gutturally as they went to the next tee.

The second hole was a short one. But such a formidable one-shotter, 180 yards long, ringed round with deep and deadly sand traps, the green narrow, hard and guileful of contour. To play for the hole was to roll past it and on into a bunker. To play safe was possible, but in that event a cunning slope enticed the ball to the most distant edge of the green. There was a third method, of course, but since that required pitching the ball directly into the hole, nobody had ever tried it.

But that was how James played it. Before the startled caddie could pluck the flag from the hole, his ball had dropped neatly into it, wedging itself between pin and cup to obviate any possibility of bouncing out again.

There was a long-drawn "Ah-h-h" from the crowd massed around the green. Two consecutive holes in one! The like had never been seen or heard of.

Flammenwerfer tried hard, but could not duplicate the feat. Looking like a Siegfried who has just discovered that the dragon has stolen his enchanted sword, he strode to the next hole.

James also felt embarrassed, if for different reasons. He could not go on like this, winning every hole in one. Surely the charm must allow him some choice of method.

He remembered that in his mind, as he had hit his tee shot at the previous two holes, had been merely his objective, and the desire to get there. This time he would select a mark somewhere short of the green.

It was a long hole, 560 yards. James aimed at a spot 200 yards away. Straight as an arrow, the ball flew there.

Two hundred yards was no drive for a champion. With something almost like a smile, Flammenwerfer slammed his ball seventy yards farther. James picked out another spot on the fairway, well short of the green, and hit it neatly. Flammenwerfer, certainly a brave and gifted golfer when not warring against the fates, dropped his second shot dead for an assured birdie three.

James thought he had better let him win the hole. He aimed for the rough right of the green. The ball started in the desired direction but curved in midair, dropped on the green and rolled, still curving, into the hole. Flammenwerfer was a man of iron. But even iron can lose its temper. Perhaps that hitherto imperturbable champion lost his, for he missed his two-foot putt.

Had it really been Flammenwerfer's fault, James wondered, or was it that the charm would not permit him to lose a hole? He determined to give it the acid test. Meandering diagonally across the fairway, 200 yards from the fourth tee at its nearest, was a sluggish brook. With great deliberation he drove his ball into it and saw with satisfaction the resulting splash of muddy water. Flammenwerfer, snatching at his advantage, drove a ball over the brook and beautifully down the middle of the fairway.

James found a crowd of commiserating spectators around his ball, and saw to his delight that its position was hopeless. Half embedded in sludge under four inches of water, it nestled for further safety against one end of a board which acted as a retaining wall for the muddy farther side of the ditch.

"It's unplayable. He'll have to go back and drive another," said his caddie gloomily.

But James would have none of it. He did not intend to imperil this heaven-sent opportunity to lose the hole. Placing one foot on a stone and the other on the bank, he swung gallantly with a niblick in the general direction of the ball where it lay dimly gleaming in its sure refuge. Opponent and spectators drew back to evade the expected splash. But what happened defeated all precaution. Like an ax in the hands of a berserk woodsman, the niblick divided the waters, cleaved the mud, struck the ball, and heaved it and the nearer end of the six-foot retaining board which blocked it high in the air. The board, still held at its farther end, catapulted sideways a fountain of water and what seemed like half a ton of black and incredibly clinging mud. When it descended, neither Flammenwerfer nor that politely dressed crowd of spectators looked like anything their mothers would have recognized. They suggested nightmares, voodoo visions in the jungle, surrealist adventures in Harlem, but nothing English or Aryan. It was difficult to recognize in Mr. Anthony, for instance, anything that suggested a diplomat, even from Liberia. Nor had Niniane, that lovely girl, escaped unscathed. By the time James began his apologies she had achieved little more than recognizability. But it must be said in her favor that her sense of humor emerged with her features. When James proffered his more adequate handkerchief she laughed hysterically.

"Is this a golf game," she asked, "or a political campaign?"

James found his ball in the middle of the fairway, a long but not impossible shot to the green. His opponent's disposition had not been improved by his involuntary mud bath, but he played a long brassie shot within fifty yards of the flag. It was evident that on this 550-yard hole he would get at worst a five, and perhaps a four. It was equally evident to James that if he himself played a third shot to the green it would, with direful certainty, roll into the hole. He resolved to aim it anywhere but in the proper direction. On the left of the fairway no trouble offered, but the right was bordered by thick woods in which a red-roofed bungalow nestled. James played for the corner of the bungalow and was rewarded by the sharp sound of a ball alighting on tiles.

VI.

Followed by his bewildered caddie, he strode into the woods. His ball had struck the roof and rebounded some ten feet. Between it and the green lay the bungalow; between it and the adjacent fairway lay the impenetrable wood. James looked at the trim but solid mass of the bungalow and exulted. A placid cat, drowsing on a window sill, opened its eyes sleepily, regarded him for a moment, and closed them again. Perhaps it was reassured by the sight of the club secretary among the handful of officials and spectators who had followed James into the wood and now commiserated with him. For this was the secretary's bungalow and behind the ground-glass window, though the secretary did not know this, lay his young wife in a bath of agreeable warm water. This lady, being of a luxurious habit, was wont to temper the ardors of the toilet, with the pleasures of literature. The book she had chosen being as soothing as her scented bath water, she now found herself in much the same halcyon state of mind as her cat Daisy, which slumbered so sweetly on the windowsill without. Neither pet nor mistress, just then, was ready for any abrupt rendezvous with Fate. And yet they were to keep one, and that soon.

At that very moment, in fact, Fate's instrument stood poised, niblick in hand, with the intention of wasting a shot against the side of the bungalow under the pretense of trying to loft a ball over its roof. Alas for the plans of cats and men, for the sanctity of the home and the modesty of women! No sooner had James begun his backswing than he felt the club take charge. Like a white streak the ball flew, not against the brick wall, but against the frail window. Shattering its single pane to fragments, it whizzed with undiminished speed diagonally across the bathroom, crashed through the win-

dow of the adjoining wall, and a few seconds later a muffled shout announced its arrival on or near the distant green.

But before that was heard, a large number of other things had happened at once. It is doubtful whether a cat of domesticated habits could ever be expected to remain calm when deluged unexpectedly with large fragments of broken glass. This one was in a state of unique unpreparedness for anything of the kind. When she erupted into the air with every hair and whisker standing on end, Daisy was already a severe case of nerves. With a vague idea that the danger had come from without, she leaped blindly toward the interior of the bathroom and safety. She found none, for instead the waters of the bath closed over her head. Now water, however warm, is no element for a cat, and this one was in a mood to clutch at any straw. She discovered something more substantial in the body of her mistress, who, equally startled but less prompt in her reaction, had just begun to emerge from the bath on her own account. As rapidly as an electric current, and with much the same effects, Daisy swarmed up the tender walls of this human ark, finally to dig in at the highest point she could find.

Now probably the best thing to do if you are in a bath and a cat has taken refuge on your head is to put your head under water and encourage the cat to find some other way out of its difficulties. But the club secretary's wife did not think of that. Instead, with a single piercing scream, she leaped from the middle of the bath to the middle of the room. The window was low, as is the case in bungalows, and now that it was minus its ground glass, lay wide to the astonished gaze of the little party without.

They had a vague impression of Aphrodite arising from the waves with record speed and a dash of Medusa about the head. In the next breath Susanna perceived the Elders, and tried to walk through the closed door of the bathroom. That, of course, cannot be done, no matter how loudly one shrieks. By the time the lady had discovered this, her husband, galvanized into action by this sudden exposure of his domestic sanctities to the vulgar gaze, had raced through the bungalow to the bathroom door. To tear the spitting, clawing Daisy from his spouse's head and to fold her in his reassuring arms was the work of a moment, and here it would be proper to leave them, as did the rueful James and his little following. Of these the younger element were almost helpless with laughter. Among them, it is regrettable to note, was Niniane.

"I sa-i-d you were a lady killer," she gurgled. "Have . . . have you no shame at all?"

In contrast to the ribald mirth which it had excited among their juniors, older spectators of the harrowing event were not amused. Although not ready to affirm that James had deliberately driven his ball through the window as the only way to the green, they felt a sense of outrage that such things should be allowed to happen to an English woman on an English golf course. James caught murmurs of "By Gad, sir—" "preposterous shot," "totally unnecessary," "clowning, not golf—" which heightened his already acute embarrassment. It was nowise lessened by the fact that prolonged screams from the direction of the bungalow indicated that the lady was now indulging in a fit of hysteria.

James felt that he would like to do the same. It was with burning ears and a scarlet face that he addressed his ball, which he found lying some forty yards short of the green. This preposterous comedy, this parody of a golf game, must be ended, he was resolved, here and now. He would knock his ball into the middle of next week. And then—the bright thought struck him just as he began a vicious backswing with this intention—he would remove Merlin's ring from his finger, toss it into the thickest rough he could find, lose a dozen holes to the worthy Flammenwerfer, and retire before he had done further damage.

Alas for good intentions! The worthy Flammenwerfer, as it happened, had played his fifty-yard pitch to within a long but possible putt from the hole and now stood beside the green waiting for his rival to match it. With amazement he saw James open his shoulders and swing into his thirty-yard chip shot with enough energy for a full drive. And that was the last Herr Flammenwerfer was to see for some time. Hit with a driver, James's ball would probably have killed him. Hit with a mashie niblick, it merely gave him concussion of the brain.

"He will live," was the doctor's verdict, "but the sooner he gets to a hospital the better."

Like Mr. Brawne before him, Herr Flammenwerfer was borne away. His ears, had they been functioning, would have recorded above an excited buzz of conversation from the English-speaking crowd, and the soprano keening of the lady of the bungalow, now in diminuendo, loud shouts of Teutonic indignation from his own compatriots. Where English spectators of James Fielden's methods had only doubts, they appeared to cherish certainties that this was all part of a dark and devious Anglo-American plot against their champion. Had he not been the butt of trickery or black art? Had not mud been thrown at him—at them all? And finally had he not been a victim of assault and battery? There were threats of diplomatic protest, and even of immediate physical retaliation.

Mr. Anthony's face, black and pink before, turned black and white. "Come away," he appealed to James, "before they make an international incident of this. It's bad enough as it is. If only it had been someone else who arranged it!"

Niniane reinforced his pleading. "If the Germans don't get you," she said, "just think what the secretary is apt to do!"

"Would the charge be housebreaking," asked Captain Thruster sardonically, "or indecent assault?"

James had no reply to these quips. His sense of humor refused to function. He felt sorry for the poor lady of the bath, sorry for poor Herr Flammenwerfer, sorriest for himself. He had hoped to shine in Niniane's

eyes. Instead he had become a figure of fun himself, and inflicted physical damage and mental pain on other totally innocent persons. It was all that fool Merlin with his slap-dash methods. His magic was potent, but showed a certain medieval lack or discretion. James began to understand why miracles had dropped so inevitably out of religious practice. They complicated everything.

He sat glum and silent on the journey home. At dinner he found himself between Lady Clatter and Lady Needbore. Lady Clatter kept her ear trumpet turned the other way and Lady Needbore devoted herself ostentatiously to the partner on her right. The tale of his latest misdoing had obviously become common property. The older members of the house party were sending him to Coventry. The younger ones burst into laughter every time they looked in his direction, which was almost as bad. James gazed straight ahead and devoted himself to his dinner. The service was good at Enniscrow Castle. As fast as the nervous James emptied his glass it was filled again, and by the time dinner was over the edges of his discomfiture—and of everything else—were a little blurred.

This was well, because the situation did not improve. James drifted diffidently up to a group gathered around Niniane and found them discussing the next day's hunting. They greeted him with merry cries.

"Enter the gladiator," "Make way for the killer," "Here comes false Sextus, that did the deed of shame."

"Pay no attention to them, Mr. Fielden," said the Lady Niniane soothingly. "Their remarks, when not indelicate, are inspired by jealousy and fear. What we want to know is whether now that you have . . . ah . devasted other fields of sport you will come hunting with us tomorrow."

"I am going back to London tomorrow," said James stiffly.

"All the more reason why you should come hunting," said Niniane. "No, I mean it," she said, dropping her bantering tone. "Will you come?"

James found himself looking into her eyes and saying "I promise," when he had intended nothing of the kind.

Captain Thruster broke the spell. "If you are coming," he said, "I shall borrow a crash helmet."

"And I'll bring a dressing gown," said young Pamela Needbore with a giggle, "in case of emergency."

Indecorous laughter pursued James as he walked away. But is was more welcome than the cold silence he encountered everywhere else. He drifted into the billiard room. Three members of the hunting crowd possessed it, genial souls whom James remembered to have seen nightly, consuming brandies and sodas as he went his way to bed. They called each other Bunny, Dodo and Gerard, and James was not then or after to know them by any other names. Ordinarily he would not have sought their company. But tonight he was a derelict and they so much flotsam and jetsam floating on a common tide of alcohol.

There was, at any rate, neither frowning nor frigidity here. They invited him to join their game. He declined quickly. Billiard balls, he reflected, were even harder and more deadly than golf balls, and he had no desire further to tempt Merlin and his allies, the unkind Fates. They invited him to have a drink. He accepted. The drink, and others which followed it, dissolved his mood of depression. He began to see the ridiculous side of his day's adventures. Pressed for a first-hand relation, he supplied it with a precise choice of descriptive phrase and a dry underlining of bizarre detail that his new friends found irresistible. They were seized by paroxysms of laughter, but James, in his present mood, found it all friendly, and healing.

"You're slaying me. By Jove, you're slaying me," cried the one who was known as Gerard. "Bunny was right. He said you were pulling Sir Bertram's leg the other night. About huntin', you know."

"By Gad, so he did," Dodo agreed. Dodo was very tall, very solemn, and his red hair was parted in the middle. "Though how he knew beats me."

"It was because he kept his face so straight," said Bunny complacently. "Nobody but a curate could keep his face as straight as that and mean it."

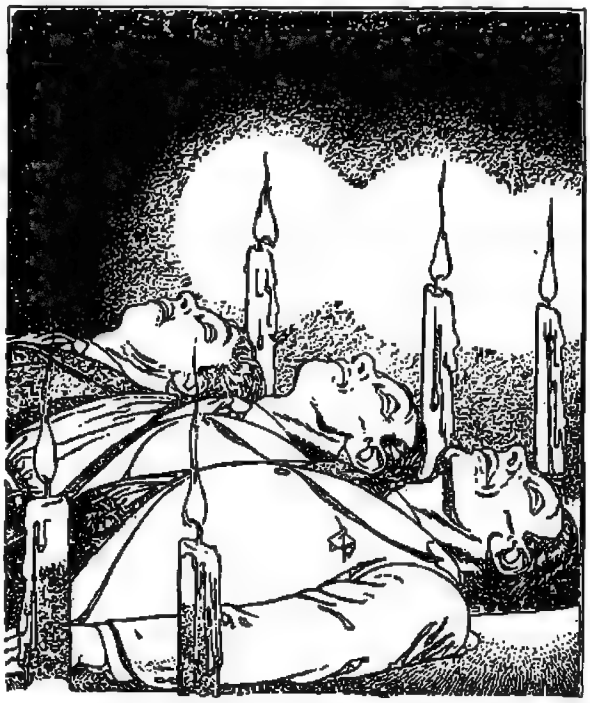
"I'll wager you hunt yourself," said Gerard.

"I don't," said James, "but now that you remind me, I thought of learning the sport tomorrow. I suppose I should get to bed early."

"To hell with bed," said Gerard, the red-faced one. "The night's young and the brandy's old."

"No," said Bunny, "he's right, you know. If we're going to hunt we mustn't get boiled. And I'm beginning to simmer myself."

"You'll take your fences all the better for it tomorrow," said Gerard. "But I'll tell you what. We'll do what we used to do in our mess in India. It was at



Peshawar, you know, in the hill country, which meant that you always had to be ready for a night alarm whether you were on duty or not. So we made it a rule that when no one was left who could stand on his head we all went to bed."

"Sounds silly to me," said Dodo. "Why didn't you walk a chalk line?"

"We used to," said Gerard. "And to make it harder you had to walk it with your eyes closed. And then a fellow came to our mess named Hare—March Hare we called him, for he was as mad as one when he was sober. But do you know, that fellow could walk a chalk line with his eyes shut when the rest of us were all under the table! And it wasn't until they caught him walking the ridgepole of a marquee in his pajamas one night that we knew why. He was a somnambulist. So we changed to standing on your head. It's harder. It makes the fumes rush there or something."

"I don't know whether I could even do it cold sober," objected James.

"Neither do I," agreed Bunny, "but I'll bet you all a pound I last longest."

"It's a new game to me," said Dodo, "but I'll take you."

"And I'm on," said Gerard.

At the word "game" a warning bell seemed to ring in James' brain, but so faintly and from so far away that he heeded it not. "Count me in," he said, "I might have beginner's luck."

Gerard placed a cushion on the floor and with the assistance of his two hands and several grunts balanced himself upside down upon it. James, to his surprise, was able to imitate him. So was Bunny. But when the solemn Dodo hoisted his long legs into the air he lost his equilibrium and fell with a loud crash through the doors of the billiard room. To the ladies of the house party, ascending at the moment like angels to bed, his prone form, with the red faces and loud-laughter of his companions for background, conveyed a brief but unholy suggestion of bacchanalia and that purely masculine and clownish ribaldry which women do not understand and therefore cannot pardon. Had the mouth of hell opened, displaying Satan and his imps complete with horns and tails, Lady Clatter and Lady Needbore at least could scarcely have looked more disapproving.

Dodo, looking sheepish, picked himself up and closed the door. James was perturbed, but Gerard was no whit abashed.

"Don't worry about those two old busybodies," he said. "You've done them a service, Dodo—given them a bit of scandal to take to bed with them. Eleanor Enniscrow is a good sport, likes her guests to enjoy themselves. Let's have another drink. Do you feel a burning sensation in your pockets? It's those three pounds I am going to win."

"Over my—hic—dead body," said Bunny.

"Over your dead-drunk body, you mean," said Gerard. "And, by the way you're hiccuping, I don't think it will be long now."

"You're quite wrong," said Bunny with dignity. "It's not the brandy; it's the soda. I'm always likely to get it when I drink soda. It runs in our family."

"You mean it blows in your family," said Gerard unfeelingly. "It's just the wind blowing through your family tree."

"It's—hic—no joke," said Bunny. "People have—hic—died of it. I remember one of my aunts—hic—hiccuping for a whole day. They had to give her drugs to—hic—quiet her."

James looked sympathetic. "I have heard," he remarked, "that if you drink out of the wrong side of a glass it stops you."

"I've tried it," said Bunny, "but, dash it—hic—my neck is so stiff or something that I don't—hic—seem able to manage it."

"Why don't you stand on your head," volunteered Gerard, "and then drink in the ordinary way? It should amount to the same thing."

Bunny looked doubtful, but Dodo, whose fall had barred him from continuing the contest, but not the brandies and sodas, loudly agreed that it would be either the same or better. So Bunny, with some difficulty, again stood on his head.

"We had better not give him any soda," said Gerard, "because that makes him hiccup." He poured out half a glass of neat brandy and began carefully to decant it into the open mouth of his friend. The operation had to be interrupted from time to time to allow Bunny to hiccup, and finally, despite Gerard's care, a gulp going down met, somewhere in Bunny's weasand, a hiccup coming up. He collapsed on the floor with a crash and coughed and sputtered so alarmingly that Gerard and James stood him on his feet, and Gerard slapped him vigorously on the back. Under these rude ministrations he regained his breath.

"Hang it," he said, "I thought for a moment I was drowned. Of all the shilly-ass ideas, Gerard, you get the shilliest."

"Just the same it's cured your hiccups," said Gerard.

And so it had. The brandy had cured Bunny's hiccups, but at the expense of his sobriety. He collapsed upon a sofa and ceased to take an active interest in his surroundings. By this time Dodo was loudly asleep in a chair.

VII.

Gerard, obviously a drinker of proved ability and long experience, was still holding out. But his face was purple and in his speech and movements liberation was thinly masking difficulty. He was drinking more and more slowly, and each time he upended himself his balance was obviously more precarious. Finally he attained an equilibrium so brief that its achievement and termination looked less like a headstand than a somersault. But the only effect of James' potations had been to give him a feeling of complete, almost supernatural control over his faculties. It was so acute that he felt he could, if he wished, take off from the floor and float around the room. Instead, he matched Gerard's sketchy perform-

ance with an equilibristic feat that normally he would have found completely impossible and equally distasteful. He stood on his head, folded his arms on his chest, clapped his heels together several times, cried, "Look Gerard!" and then regained his feet by means of a neat handspring.

Gerard's feelings found vent.

"It's not human," he said. "The more you drink the better you get. We've had fifteen double brandies and all they've done is to give you a wild look in your eye."

James laughed heartlessly. "Beware! Beware! My flashing eyes, my floating hair," he declaimed. "Don't you know, Gerard, that I on honey-dew have fed and drunk the milk of Paradise?"

"It may be milk to you," said Gerard, "but it'sh beginning to sour on me." With obvious reluctance he drained another glass, hoisted himself to his feet and approached the cushion. His intention was to drop on his knees, place his head upon it and hoist himself heavenward as before. But Gerard's timing had been affected by his libations. He forgot about his knees, and merely tried with head and hands to make a three-point landing on the cushion. It was notably unsuccessful. He crashed to the floor, and lay spread-eagled upon it in the attitude which, James thought, seemed to have become characteristic of all who engaged in any form of competition with him.

Without opening his eyes, Gerard murmured: "You've won. Firsh time ever beaten. Here's pound." But before he could pay his wager, alcohol, reinforced perhaps by slight concussion, took him to its own, and Gerard lay slumbering heavily but peacefully upon the carpet.

At the words, "You've won," James felt his unnatural sobriety drop away and drunkenness rush upon him. The vivid perceptiveness, the acute sense of co-ordination in which he had been rejoicing a moment before disappeared. His mind, which had been like a searchlight on a clear night, became like a candle in a fog. He seemed to be looking at his three snoring companions as though through the large end of an opera glass. The faint warning chime whose signal he had disregarded two hours earlier began to ring again, this time like a passing bell. "You've been playing games again," was its message, "and of course you had to win, and now you've won and you're drunk, you're befuddled, you're besotted. Worse, you've betrayed three better men into the same condition. What will Enniscrow Castle think when it sees them lying there next morning? What will Niniane think?"

What indeed? As James stood swaying on his feet, with wave after wave of intoxication rolling over his head and threatening to drag him out into a sea of oblivion, he knew that something must be done. He must get Gerard and Bunny and Dodo to bed. He opened the door of the billiard room, to be confronted with deep darkness. Someone had turned off the lights that should have illuminated hall and stairway. James felt along walls, fell over chairs and sofas, but could find no switches. And then he remembered the pleasing custom whereby, in this day of grace and electricity, guests of Enniscrow Castle were still supplied with candles in ancient silver sconces, to light their way to bed. There should be some in the billiard room.

There were. James lighted one and again explored for switches. But he found none, for they had been put by design in places where they would not show. Very well then; he would use candles. He lighted more of them and placed them at strategic points. He dragged the limp form of Bunny to the foot of the staircase. With more difficulty he did the same for the lengthy Dodo. But Gerard had been designed for cargo capacity rather than streamlines, and to make port with him strained James's rapidly declining energies. He had his three friends at the foot of the staircase, but he knew now that it was as far as he could bring them. Self-preservation dictated that he should go upstairs himself while the going was good. But dimly through his brain coursed the thought: Supposing people should come downstairs in the dark and step on Dodo, or Bunny or Gerard? Suppose Gerard, or Bunny or Dodo should waken and find themselves in unrelieved gloom? They might hurt themselves. They might be afraid of the dark and have hysterics. James made a last, unsteady voyage to the library, lighted every candle he found there and set them carefully about the three recumbent and parallel forms.

Mistily, as he took a last look at the scene, he became aware that it suggested some familiar association. The still forms, the flickering candles, what was it? "Why, of course," he said to himself, "opera, Tosca, Scarpia. Tha'sh what they are, Scarpias. Three Scarpias. But I didn't kill them, and I don't feel like singing about them either. Anyway, it'sh time for bed."

It was high time for bed. Halfway up the stairs James found his equilibrium deserting him. He began to complete the journey on his hands and knees.

It was at this juncture that Lady Needbore passed along the dimly lighted hallway at the head of the stairs. Perhaps she had been helping her friend, Lady Clatter, to bring up to date for castle and county the *chronique scandaleuse*. For this sort of journalism, like others, is mostly done at night. The suspicion, on the other hand, may be unworthy, and Lady Needbore, as one who would rather prevent scandal than retail it, may merely have been paying a nocturnal visit to her daughters. And there is always the fact that the bathroom facilities as Castle Enniscrow were overtaxed by the unusual proportions of the house party.

Whatever the reason, it is a matter of simple history that Lady Needbore, in a dressing gown, passed the head of the stairway as James, on his hands and knees, had all but gained its top step. What followed was not so simple, and drama rather than history. Viewed from the top of the stairs in the flickering light of the corpse candles that surrounded them, the three prone figures undoubtedly looked like so many cadavers. Even to James they had suggested tragic opera. But to Lady Needbore, better acquainted with Castle Enniscrow's long tradition of murders, wraiths, banshees, specters,

bogles, benignant and malignant hauntings, they suggested things that made the hair rise on her head and her skin develop qualities that would have been useful on the outside of a matchbox.

Perhaps in another second, reason might have prevailed and the cry that rose gurgling in the good lady's throat have been denied utterance. But at that precise moment a scrambling figure on all fours mounted the ultimate step of the stairs and crawled along the hall almost under the very skirts of Lady Needbore's dressing gown. It's face was averted, the hall was dim; there was no real chance for Lady Needbore to recognize who it was or even *what* it was. It might merely have been a murderer; but then on the other hand it could have been a ghoul fresh from feasting on the dead.

This, however, was a nice point which Lady Needbore did not stop to debate. Instead, the incipient scream inspired by the sight of the mortuary scene below stairs, was allowed to find vent and came into the world all the the stronger for being delayed in gestation. It split the nocturnal peace in which Castle Enniscrow lay wrapped from top to bottom. It accelerated the crawling motion of the creature which had inspired it to what Lady Needbore afterward described as "a sort of horrid scramble."

This actually did less than justice to James, whose four-footed progress down the hall, stimulated by Lady Needbore's whoops, may have been an atavistic performance, but was one whose speed would have thrown no disgrace on his remotest forefathers. Before she had screamed twice he had rounded the corner of the corridor leading to his room, and before a single door had opened in response to her ululations he had gained his own and thrown himself inside. He even managed to crawl into bed and draw the clothes up to his chin. And then oblivion took him, and Lady Needbore's hysterics, the loud reassurances and interrogations of the ladies who sought to minister to her, the puffings and heavy footsteps of the men as they carried the still senseless forms of Bunny and Dodo and Gerard in disgrace to bed, troubled neither his conscience nor his dreams.

James's slumbers were profound, but they were not refreshing. If his evening had closed on a theme from "La Tosca," morning opened appropriately with a feeling that the anvil chorus from "Il Trovatore" was being played with great fire and vigor on his head. He could feel the blows and see the sparks. It must have been going on for some time, for otherwise why should his head feel red-hot and twice its usual size? James opened his eyes, closed them with a groan, opened them again—and saw untouched and cold by his bedside the "morning cup of tea" which the maid had as usual deposited there. He had been in the habit of pouring it out his window rather than drink it or hurt her feelings by scorning an old English custom. But this morning he gulped it eagerly and could have sworn that he heard it hiss as it went down. The cup rattled against his teeth. When he tried to sit up, the room played seesaw with him. Dully, he perceived that he was still in his dinner jacket. Dimly he wondered why.

And then, above the dull roaring in his ears, a small but insistent voice began to make itself heard. "You promised," it said.

James fumbled at his disordered tie, his strangling collar. He would get into pajamas and fall again into merciful sleep, before his head burst or his jangled nerves stretched and broke. He would— But again from the depths of consciousness came the reminder: "You promised."

"Promised? What did I promise?" James asked. He asked it aloud and indignantly, as though his tormentor were somewhere in the room. For this young man had drunk enough alcohol the night before to incapacitate many a more experienced drinker for forty-eight hours. Had it not been for the categorical imperative now voicing itself in his brain, it is doubtful whether anything short of physical violence would have aroused him before evening. As it was his hold on reality was slight.

"You promised—her," vouchsafed the voice.

It was little information, but it was enough. Drunk or sober, there was only one "her" now to James. And drunk or sober, he would keep his promise to her. But what was it? The anvil chorus seemed to change its tune to "A-hunting We Will Go."

"I promised to go hunting with her," said James. He darted a glance at the clock by his bedside. Eleven! The meet would have taken place an hour before, and here he was without horse or habit. He could not ride at any time as they accounted riding, and now he could scarcely stand up. He was drunk, unshaven, disgraced. He had better pack and leave Enniscrow Castle before the hunt returned. He had—

"You promised," said the voice.

Setting the Fielden jaw in a grim line and steadying himself against the end of his bed, James disrobed, drew himself a cold bath and, while it was filling, rang. Dimly he was relieved to see that it was his friend George, the footman, who responded. George's feelings seemed to be equally compounded of surprise and admiration.

"George," said James, "could you get me some breakfast and some hunting kit, all in the space of ten minutes?"

"I could that, sir. Major Bingham—was you with him by any chance last night, sir?—won't be needing his today. Neither will two other gentlemen, but his would fit you best. I'll ask his man. And what would you want for breakfast, sir?"

"Take a look at me, George," said James, "and bring what you think I need."

"Very good, sir. I think I know what you mean. And what you gentlemen from America call a pick-me-up?"

"All right," said James, "but make sure it's also a stay-me-down."

"Ha, ha, sir. Very good, sir. You always have your joke." And George departed, chuckling.

"Joke," said James as he lowered himself into his cold bath. "Joke! The English would poke fun at a

death's head. And that," he added when he surveyed himself in his shaving mirror, "is not far removed from the present instance."

The cold bath and George's pick-me-up gave James strength to shave and to scramble into the riding breeches that, he conjectured, must belong to none other than his late drinking companion, and final victim. But they could not give him an appetite for breakfast, and, without foundation of food, proved treacherous allies. By the time he had made his way to the stables, James found himself carefully placing one foot in front of another, like a man who picks his way through a fog.

He found the stables surprisingly empty. Finally a youth garbed like an undergroom appeared.

"Can you give me a horse?" James asked. "I was to have gone out with the hunt, but I overslept. I'll catch up with them."

"O Lor', sir, that I can't," said the boy. "There isn't a riding horse left in the stables. The few that was left over, sir, was borrowed from us by Sir Trevor Bigham for a party that came unexpected like to stay at. The 'All, sir. The grooms has taken them over and there's only me here."

"But haven't you got any sort of a horse?" asked James.

"No, sir, nothing you could throw a leg over in the 'ole stables."

Dully, James turned away. His agonies had been all for nothing, then. He had promised Niniane and broken his promise, and he had no excuse to give that would stand the light of day. There had been something in her eyes as she had asked him to come—it had come and gone like summer lightning—that had sent thrilling through his nerves the hope of a future dizzying and sweet. And now, cursed fool, he had thrown away his chance.

It was at this moment that James heard, almost at his elbow, the high-pitched neighing of a horse.

The boy had disappeared. Why had he said there were no riding horses in the stables? James opened the door of the stall—and knew. There was a horse there, a lot of one. Equally, even James could see that this was no riding horse. Not even for a knight of old, clad in full armor, with his ladylove on a pillion behind.

What James beheld was a Shire stallion. Generations of breeders have produced nothing bigger or stronger. Not even the Percheron or the Clydesdale is so magnificent a specimen of equine power. And this was a champion specimen of the breed, the apple of Sir Bertram's eye, darling of the show ring, winner of a score of medals, and ribbons galore. His name, blazoned in brave letters above his manger, was Pride of Penzance.

Pride of Penzance was black from head to foot, glossy black. A shade over seventeen hands high, an English ton in weight, he bulked in the shadowed confines of his stall like an ocean liner in dock. His abundant covering of long, black hair had been carefully brushed, combed and parted down his short, straight back and allowed to feather out from his hocks so that it completely obscured his huge hoofs. No bantam, but feathered like one, he was a living picture of tremendous but docile strength. When James made a fumbling entrance into his stall he turned his broad head on his long, arched neck and nuzzled against the visitor's pocket for sugar. For deep in that enormous chest dwelt a heart as gentle and kind as that of any Newfoundlander that was ever left to guard a toddling baby.

That was the Pride of Penzance, the most distinguished occupant of Castle Enniscrow's stables. He was, James soon discovered, also the only one. The hunters were hunting, the workhorses in the fields working. He shouted for the groom, but even the groom had gone. There were left only himself—and the Pride of Penzance.

By no stretch of the imagination could that giant of his race be considered a riding horse. James knew that. But James no longer cared. He stood swaying on his feet, his early-morning wretchedness returned in full vigor, every nerve crying out for rest and sleep, but that small voice within him still enforcing its dictatorship over his rebellious stomach, his confused head. Suddenly James laughed a short laugh.

"I promised," he said. "All right, I'll keep my promise in a big way."

He lurched through the stables in search of saddle and bridle. When he found them, he had to notch fresh holes in the girth to permit it to circle the enormous bulk of the Pride of Penzance, and to stretch the bridle to its fullest extent to insert the bit between his huge jaws. Eventually he led his strange mount into the stable yard, saddled and bridled after a fashion no self-respecting hunter would have tolerated. But the Pride of Penzance took it all in good part. He had been ridden before. As many as three farm hands at a time had availed themselves of his broad back for a lift home from the fields, and their weight had incommoded him no more than that of his own hair.

James clambered into the saddle, no easy matter in his condition. "Take the graveled road to the left of the stables," George had said, "and keep on until you come to the pine wood. Take the first path you see to the left. That's Sandy Lane and will lead you to Spook Spinney, which is the most likely place they'll be looking for a fox."

James took the graveled road. The Pride of Penzance sniffed the morning air, tossed his arched neck and, to James' surprise, struck into a trot. James knew it must be a trot, for it was not a gallop. So large-scale, however, so planetary was the movement and so broad the back upon which he sat that he felt as though he were straddling a motor car whose driver was trying to reach Ireland via the Giant's Causeway. But the motion, he reflected, was probably just the thing for his liver.

He did not know whether to give credit to this, or Merlin, the fact that his head began rapidly to clear. Hunting, after all, came within the range of those sports and games in the practice of which he had been guaranteed success by his mighty, but strangely indiscriminating,

patron. With returning perspicacity came a sense of the ridiculousness of the figure he would cut, mounted on this mastodon, in the eyes of Lady Niniane and of the hunt in general. But it was balanced by a cynical and reckless humor. He had already been thrust irrevocably beyond the pale by the series of bizarre and unseemly adventures into which his contract with Merlin had led him. It was given to him now to perceive the dramatic fitness of this, his last appearance, as the grotesque appropriate crown of all that had gone before.

VIII.

He came to the pine wood and took the path to the left. Fifteen minutes brought him to Spook Spinney. He arrived at a crucial moment. The hunt had been late in meeting; Spook Spinney, a cover which almost never drew blank, had been late in producing a fox. By the time one was finally started, the younger members of the field had got out of hand and headed him back into the spinney, where he was lost. These developments had done everything but improve the temper of the new M. F. H. His face had grown as red as his coat and shocked matrons had moved their offspring out of earshot of his language.

But finally, from one of those white-and-tan shapes hunting ardently in the green gloom of the spinney, came a long-drawn yell. The other hounds found the hot scent and elaborated this opening bar into that heart-stirring overture that tells the huntsman the curtain is being rung up on his beloved sport. James, as he reached the spinney, had a brief glimpse of the pack pouring out its farther end, followed by the huntsman, the whips, Sir Bertram, and his following. Hounds, horses and men were setting a hot pace and discharging in it the suppressed energy and the accumulated exasperation of the morning's false starts.

It was a pace that could not last, that not even a blooded hunter could keep up for long. It was nothing that should be attempted, even for a moment, by a draft horse weighing a ton. But the shire, though James did not know it, is a direct descendant of the old English warhorse. Through the elastic veins of the Pride of Penzance coursed blood that had thrilled to the sound of the trumpets at Crecy and Agincourt. Speed had been bred out of him, but not his great heart. Here was thunder and shouting, and, like his scriptural ancestor, the Pride of Penzance pricked up his ears and neighed a loud "Ha, ha!" Then, spreading his huge hoofs in an awkward but stretching gallop, he began to clatter along the edge of the spinney after the pack.

Past the spinney, down a long slope of grassland and up another, he thundered. When he reached its crest, James saw the tail of the hunt disappear into another pine wood. It was an ancient wood, filled with cathedral silence, the trunks of its huge trees covered to a height of ten feet with a thin coating of moss. It was like the Bronze Wood through which the hero rides in Grimms' fairy tales, before he comes to the Silver Wood and the Gold Wood. Fresh air, alcohol and his surroundings combined to invest the ride for James with a strange, dreamlike quality. As the Pride of Penzance went pounding down the long aisles of the pine wood like a flying freight over a rough stretch of track, he began to feel as though he had ridden out of reality into the fourth dimension. This did not diminish when a chorus of yapping ahead indicated that the hounds had checked, and an occasional gleam of a red-skirted coat told him that he was overtaking the hunt.

Before he had quite overtaken it, the hounds found again and the field was off. Through the pine wood they pounded and over another stretch of pasture. This gave way to farm land, and their way was barred by a long stretch of thorny hedge. It was low only at one point and on the other side of this was a duck pond, deeper but as muddy as all its kind. Sir Bertram and his immediate following, knowing their country like a book, availed themselves of a gate at the extreme right. Niniane did the same, but turned back at left angles with the kindly intention of warning off the young, the imprudent or the ignorant from the duck pond. Just as James thundered up, young Pamela Needbore had charged the hedge at a half gallop, but, warned by Niniane's shout, had checked her mount at the last moment. James tried to follow her example, but he might as well have tried to bridle an avalanche. The Pride of Penzance took off from the ground as a wrecked freight takes off from a railroad track, sideswiped Pamela's horse with his huge hindquarters and soared diagonally over the hedge. The impact drove the lighter hunter into the hedge, but sent his luckless rider flying, still sitting an imaginary mount, half over, half through its spiny top. Pamela had elected that day to wear a pair of light summer jodhpurs. They were ill-adapted for riding a thornbush, and by the time

she had landed sitting in the duck pond, her prophecy that she would need a dressing gown if James were to have any part in the hunt had been all too obviously fulfilled.

This, however, was not the end of the young man's misdoing. Contact with Pamela's hunter threw the Pride of Penzance somewhat off his course and defeated a mighty attempt to clear the duck pond. Instead he landed in the midst of its turbid waters with a violence that sent them flying heavenward in fountain effects that were as interesting as opaque. James had time for one glimpse at the startled face of Niniane before the falling waters descended upon it. The next moment the Pride of Penzance heaved himself up, climbed out of the pond and was off in full gallop, leaving behind him two indignant studies in chiaroscuro.

James, seeking to rein him in, might as well have tried to restrain an elephant with a dog leash. Across a plowed field they pounded, over another hedge into another farm. Here the chase led across the fields, past the corner of the farmer's cottage, to the laneway on which it abutted. The gate stood open; two thirds of the hunt had already passed through it. But as James thundered toward it there stood, full in his way, the farmer's three-year-old son. James wrenched mightily at the bridle of his charger. They missed the farmer's son, but not a clothes line on which, as on ground and hedge, the farmer's wife was drying household linen. Her scream at her endangered son had hardly died when it was followed by even shriller valedictory ululation over the disappearance of the more intimate part of her week's wash. Through the gate and down the lane it departed, kite-tailing bravely on its reft line from the mighty neck and shoulders of the Pride of Penzance. Endowed unaware with a comet's characteristic feature, that startled animal did his best to imitate a comet's speed. He overtook the main body of the hunt before it had left the lane. A head, slewing round over pink-coated shoulders to divine the cause of this mighty clatter of hoofs, disclosed the surprised face of Captain Thruster. Fate had another and greater surprise in store for him. As surely as a bola thrown by the hand of an Argentine gaucho, a pair of stockings wrapped themselves around his neck, an article of lingerie not uncommonly in next association with them blinded his eyes, and muffled his protests, and he was dragged from his saddle with a violence which indicated that a crash helmet would indeed have been a useful precaution on that day.

Freed of his distasteful trappings as suddenly as he had acquired them, the Pride of Penzance galloped on, a clothes horse no more. His mighty lungs were heaving, his glossy hide was in a lather, but his pace still resisted all James's efforts to rein him in. And if he was nearing the end of his tether, so was the chase. When they debouched from the lane on rolling pasture land there were the fox, the hounds close on his track and, in irregular procession behind them, Sir Bertram, his huntsman, whipper-in and a half dozen keen riders all going as though their own lives, not the fox's, hung on every hoofbeat. In every line of their set faces and tense bodies, thought James, was expressed the conviction that to be in at the death of that small red animal before them was the supreme experience of civilization.

At the thought, the trancelike quality of the morning's experience seemed to deepen in James. His dream turned into a nightmare in which the red coats of the riders took on a horried symbolism, the yapping, slavering hounds became embodiments of all cruelty which has ever spattered the story of man and the panting, toiling figure ahead, the helpless victim of some dark, Druidic blood sacrifice. Thrilling through his veins ran a fierce determination to balk these demon hunters of their prey.

With a shout he spurred on the Pride of Penzance for the first time in that morning's ride. He felt the mighty loins flex and reflex beneath him as their tired but willing owner gave of his brave best, he heard the thunder of his hoofs increase. A few score strides and he was level with the foremost riders, a few more and he had passed them. As he passed, he saw Sir Bertram Enniscrow, M. F. H., for the first time become conscious of the unbidden presence in this, his hunt, of the stranger who as a household guest had already marred the orderly chronicle of domestic events with so many bizarre and uncomfortable happenings. He saw Sir Bertram's eyes widen as he recognized the Pride of Penzance, saw his face swell and redden, saw his mouth open. From all appearances would have emerged comment of a kind to wither the earth and blast heaven.

But fate willed that it should never find vent, for just at that moment, a huge clod from one of the mighty hoofs of the Pride of Penzance took his owner full in the mouth and effectually sealed it. There are tribes of men who eat clay and like it, but Sir Bertram was obviously no geophagist. James had a moment's vision of him, standing in his stirrups, whip brandished heavenward, eyes protruding, mouth spouting clay and bad words, a vision apocalyptic and apoplectic. And then the Pride of Penzance was among the hounds, and had committed the unforgivable offense of kicking several, yelping, out of his way. But if the charger's offense was unforgivable, that of his rider was monstrous, and, in the three-hundred-year annals of English fox hunting, probably unique.

For as his mount drew level with the small, spent, fury figure just beyond reach of the hounds' jaws, James leaned from his saddle, scooped it up, and rode off with it in his arms. Once there, the fox lay as limply as a slain warrior on his way to Valhalla across the saddlebow of a Valkyrie. Whether motivated by intelligence or fatigue, is was obvious that he would make no difficulties for his rescuer. The difficulties, it was immediately apparent, would be made by his pursuers.

At the sight of this monstrous rape of their natural, their traditional and sanctified prey from under their very noses, men and hounds simultaneously gave tongue, and, amid a chorus of shouts, curses, howls and oaths, began with a common impulse to pursue the perpetrator

of the sacrilege. The other had been but the chase, which is mimic war, but this was a crusade against the heathen, the blasphemer of holy things. As hotly as the fires of the Inquisition and as eager to consume a victim, burned the hearts of Sir Bertram and his followers as they raised the hue and cry.

As he listened to the yapping and yelling behind him, James began to feel, in a new, intensified and unpleasantly personal way, the agony of the fox and all things imminently pursued by the forces of destruction. Hounds, he knew, had been known to drag down a man, and he was not at all sure that Sir Bertram and his companions would be too anxious to prevent them. They were impeccably mounted, while the Pride of Penzance had already gone ten times too far and too fast for one of his breed. He could only hope that this, too, would be considered a sport and within the meaning of the act according to Merlin.

For five minutes they pounded on, with hounds and men still hot at their heels. Then ahead of him, on his left, James saw what had been a rutted track in the pasture-land dive between sparse woods and thick hedges and become a lane. Along the track and toward the lane two herdsmen were urging a herd of cattle, of the breed from which Cornwall derives the clotted cream for which it is famed. In another minute they would enter the lane, but James, with hope dawning in him, resolved to enter it first. He made it—by seconds—and then the cattle closed in behind him and the narrow way was filled with tossing heads and trotting, bulky forms. A few more seconds and what he had foreseen occurred. On the heels of the herd arrived a flying wedge of eager hounds, pressed under the hoofs of the frightened cows, tried to leap over their backs, nipped their flanks and drove them into a wild panic. In a moment the lane was jammed solid with milling, lowing, eye-rolling bovinity, the air filled with the shouts of the herdsmen and the curses of the whip and huntsmen as they tried to extricate the hounds. As James pressed on, it swiftly died on his ear. The pursuit had been dammed in full flood. The danger was over.

And then, they trotted past a familiar gate. Inside was a farmyard. On the ground and on the hedge linen was drying; a broken fragment of line dangling from a pole told where but a short time before other linen had fluttered in the breeze. Another criminal had returned to the scene of his crime.

James reined in the Pride of Penzance. As he did, so, the fox, which had lain so quietly across his saddle, leaped with one spring to the ground, with another in the middle of the farmyard. A flock of hens was clucking there. With an entire disregard of the Golden Rule, the fox gathered the neck of the plumpest of them in his jaws, bounded with it over the farther hedge and was gone.

That he had been rescued from the necessity of providing dinner for others was no reason why the fox, being rescued, should neglect to provide his own. In this the fox was far more logical than James, who could not help regarding the incident as the final touch of pathos, the ridiculous anticlimax which typified the foolishness and fatuity of all that he had been and done at Castle Enniscrow. The trancelike mood in which he had begun his morning's adventure, the sharp excitement which had ended it, were alike gone. Left was only a writhing awareness of himself as a clown, a laughing stock, a preposterous prig whom not even a supernatural patron could keep from making a fool of himself. There was only one thing left for him now—flight. Flight back to his own world of past actions, since he was obviously so singularly unfitted for the world of present ones. Before the hunt returned to Castle Enniscrow, he must be gone.

While James's reflections were taking this somber turn, the Pride of Penzance, with head hanging as low as his rider's, was picking his way home. Through the pine wood, past the spinney and down the graveled road they went. Now they stood at the door of the still, silent stables. Into his stall James led the Pride of Penzance, draped a stable blanket over his lathered bulk, and patted his mighty neck with a prayer that no harm should come from his morning's exertions. There was no sign of Sir Bertram nor his friends. With another prayer of thankfulness, James hurried into the hall. There, standing in front of the fireplace, he found Niniane.

She had changed her muddied habit for a housedress of cool green. It matched her sea-green eyes and caressed the fluent contours of her undinelike figure. The look she bent on James was enigmatic. Not even her far ancestress, Niniane the water sprite, could have looked more desirable, James thought, nor more fateful.

"Well?" she said.

Into James's cheeks, pale with fatigue, the cool interrogation brought a flush. As he looked at her and was shaken by the sense of her exquisite desirableness, his face took on an expression bitter and desperate.

"Well?" he repeated harshly. "How musically you say that, Niniane, but how much significance you give it. 'Well, what sort of fool have you made of yourself this time and what sort of explanation have you for it?' is what it means. Well, I haven't killed anybody, as far as I know, but they will be bringing your friend, Captain Thruster, in, soon on his way to the hospital. I don't think I have quite killed your father's best show horse, but that remains to be seen. I think I ruined a number of the hounds, and I certainly carried the fox away from under your father's nose. You don't lynch people here, I understand, but you have lunatic asylums. It would be better for me to leave before your father gets back. And that's all I did this time."

"It seems quite enough," said Niniane. "But—why?"

"If you mean 'how,' I can tell you. I can tell you, but you won't believe it. You'll believe I was right about the lunatic asylum. Your ancestor, Merlin, whom we were talking about the other night. Well, he really was your ancestor. He really was double-crossed by your ancestress with one of his own spells. And I released him from it by accident—that's how the tomb in your

library got broken. These spells may be a kind of hypnotism—Yoga—that sort of thing. I don't know. Anyway, in return for what I had done, he gave me two of them. One was to insure me success in the things you seem to set such store on here. You know, games and all that sort of thing."

"This is a fairy tale, of course, James. But why are you telling it to me?" It was the first time she had used his Christian name, but James was too intent to remark it.

"Because it's the truth. Oh, I know it's incredible, but you see, you will soon have proof of it. I said Merlin gave me two charms."

"And the other?"

"Is to make you love me."

The words came defiantly from between his clenched teeth. The Lady Niniane looked indignant. She noted the lines of resolution that furrowed his tired face and read pain and longing there. For an instant a complex of expressions seemed to flaw the transparency of her sea-green eyes, realization, relief—could it even be a sort of tender amusement?—and then they became as enigmatic as before.

"Everything's fair in love or war," said James.

"Not fair, effective. In war perhaps. Your enemy is just as dead if you stab him in the back. But love? Assuming your incredible story is true and you have this power—of what use would my love be to you if you knew that you had never earned it? It would be like taking a sleepwalker to wife."

"At least no one else would have you. I couldn't bear that. Oh, I know what you are going to say. I know what I am. Nature's fool turned ravisher. Another Faust who's sold his soul to the devil. Well, the price is not too high. If I lose you, I lose it anyway. You have drawn my soul from me. You have water witch's blood in you. I know it for I would willingly sink down in the green depths with you—and for you, it seems. It makes me laugh to remember that a few short weeks ago I thought a man's work was all that mattered. History! When I look into your eyes I can read more history than Alexander ever dreamed of. The story of the race. The meaning of life. My fate. It's all there."

"It's all there, is it? I never dreamed my eyes were so expressive. And the charm, where do you keep it?"

"Here in my watchcase. And I am going to use it."

"You are going to use it? You are going to take me whether I will or not? Well, in that case"—swiftly she dropped her negligent pose and came to James's side—"well, in that case, since I must yield, it would be better to yield gracefully. Dear James"—and she took his hot cheeks between her cool hands—"dear, sweet, silly James, did you never hear that the quickest way to win a woman is to ask her?"

"You mean— Niniane, you can't mean?"

She mimicked him. "Yes, I mean and I can mean. Why were you so sure that I couldn't? There's a limit to what a woman can do in the way of encouragement. Even if she has witch's blood in her."

"But I can't do any of the things you do," said James.

"If you mean games and sports," she said, "I am not exactly tired of them, but I am tired of people who can't do or think or talk about anything else. I am bored by hunting sets and county society. I may not have a brain, but I know one when I meet it. What does a woman want in a man? Something different—from herself and everybody else. And you must admit, James, that you are that. I loved you that evening when we sat together and you talked to me. You made me think—you made it exciting to think. No one else had ever done that. And besides, James, you are such a dear, silly thing and so much in need of—mothering—"

"I have been a forward girl," she said. "I think you must have used your baleful arts on me after all. Not, thank heavens, as you used them on Lady Needbore. It was you, of course?"

"I am afraid so," said James. "It was an accident."

"I recognized your handiwork. *L'homme fatal.* After all, I've been a victim myself even though you only blackened my face a few times."

"That was an accident, too."

"I shudder to think what might have happened by design. You might have blackened my character. With that charm, I mean. By the way, may I see it?"

She turned the fragment of parchment to the firelight.

"I can't read what it says. I don't see my name in it."

"It wouldn't be. Merlin didn't make it specific."

"Didn't make it specific? Do you mean it would work just as well on any other woman?"

"I suppose so," said James. "But there isn't any other."

"Then you don't need the charm. And I know a safe place for it. So there won't ever be any other woman." She rolled it into a ball. "In there," and she tossed it into the fire.

For a moment the crumpled parchment resisted the flames. And then it ignited. There was an ear-splitting crash, a blinding flash as of many lightnings. A huge flame roared for a moment up the chimney, leaving on the hearth nothing but the blackened logs. And then, borne on the wings of a terrific back draft, every particle of soot and ashes was blown into the room. James escaped most of it. Niniane escaped it not at all. She had stood in front of the fireplace, the blonde and typical product of years of gentle English living. A moment later she was transformed into something obviously made in Birmingham—Alabama—and mourning the metamorphosis.

From her suddenly brunette countenance two sea-green eyes looked oddly and accusingly at James, as two blackened hands tried vainly to shake the soot from a dress that had once also been green.

"I don't think I'll bother washing my face again," she said. "We'll just go away like this and get married."

"It was—it was an accident," said James anxiously.

THE END.

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THE REFUGEE

BY JANE RICE

This little tale concerns a flighty little woman, Paris under Nazi domination — and one who, even in meatless France, didn't lack for food. Also, it is *not* the story you'll think —

The trouble with the war, Milli Cushman thought as she stared sulkily through streaming French windows into her rain-drenched garden, was that it was so frightfully boring. There weren't any men, any more. Interesting ones, that is. Or parties. Or little pink cocktails. Or café royale. Or long-stemmed roses wrapped in crackly green wax paper. There wasn't even a decent hairdresser left.

She had been a fool to stay on. But it had seemed so exciting. Everyone listening to the radio broadcasts; the streets blossoming with uniforms; an air of feverish gaiety, heady as Moselle wine, over all the city; the con-

versations that made one feel so important—so in the thick of things. Would the Maginot Line hold? Would the British come? Would the Low Countries be invaded? Was it true America had issued an ultimatum? Subjects that, now, were outdated as Gatling guns.

It had been terrifically stimulating being asked for her opinion, as an American. Of course, she hadn't been home for a number of years and considered herself a true cosmopolite freed from the provincialities of her own country—but, still, it had been nice, in those first flurried jack-in-the-box days of the war to be able to discourse so intelligently on Americana. It had been such *fun.*

Momentarily, Milli's eyes sparkled—remembering. The sparkle faded and died.

Then, unexpectedly, the city had become a gaunt, gray ghost. No, not a ghost, a cat. A gaunt gray cat with its bones showing through, as it crouched on silent haunches and stared unwinkingly before it. Like one of those cats that hung around the alley barrels of the better hotels. Or used to hang. Cooked, a cat bore a striking resemblance to a rabbit.

Overnight, a hush had fallen on everything. It was as though the city had gasped in one long, last, labored, dying breath. And had held it. One could feel it in the atmosphere. Almost like a desperate pounding.

For some inexplicable reason, it reminded her of her childhood when she had played a game as the street lights began to bloom in the gathering dusk. "If I can hold my eyes open without blinking," she would tell herself, "until the last one is lighted, I'll get a new doll"—or a new muff—or a new hair ribbon—or whatever it might be she wanted. She could still recall that exhausted sense of time running out as the final lights went on. Most always she had won. Sometimes she hadn't, but most always she had. By the skin of her teeth.

It would be perfectly horrid, if this was one of the times when she *didn't* win. If she had to stay on and on, trotting back and forth seeing about that idiotic visa, and saving her hairpins and soap ends and things, it was going to be too utterly stultifying. It was fortunate she had had the perception to realize, before it was too late, who were the "right people" to know. It helped. Although, in these days, the right people didn't fare much better than the "wrong" ones.

Milli used "fare" in its strictest interpretation. Often, of late, she found herself dwelling, with an aching nostalgia, on her father's butcher shop in Pittsburgh. That had been before he'd invented a new deboner, or meat cleaver, or something, and had amassed an unbelievable amount of money and before he strangled to death on a loose gold filling at Tim O'Toole's clambake.

Milli's recollection of her father was but a dim blur of red face and handle-bar mustaches and a deep booming voice that Milli had associated with the line "the curfew tolls the knell of parting day," which she had been forced to learn and recite at P. S. 46. Her mother she didn't remember at all, as she had been called to pastures greener than anything Pittsburgh had to offer while Milli was yet wearing swaddling clothes in a perpetual state of dampness.

However, sharpened by adversity, Milli's recollections of the butcher shop were crystal clear. The refrigerator with whole sides of beef hanging from hooks, legs of lamb like fat tallow candles, plump chickens with thick drumsticks and their heads wrapped in brown paper, slabs of pork and veal, and, at Thanksgiving and Christmas, short-legged ducks, and high-breasted turkeys, and big, yellow geese. In the showcase had been chops, and steaks, and huge roasts, and all sorts of sausages and spiced meats laid out in white enameled trays with carrot tops in between for "dressing."

It was hopeless to dream of these things, but practically impossible to stop. The main topics of conversation no longer were of "major developments" but of where one could buy an extra ration of tea of questionable ingredients, or a gristly chop of dubious origin, or a few eggs of doubtful age—if one could pay the whopping price.

Well, as long as she had liqueur-filled chocolates, and she had had enough foresight to lay in quite a supply, she could be assured of her "share." They were better than money, at the present exchange.

The clock on the mantelpiece tinkled out the hours and Milli sighed. She should bathe and dress for dinner. But what was the use of keeping up appearances when there wasn't anyone to see. And it was dreadful curling the ends of one's hair on an iron. It was tedious and it didn't really *do* a great deal for one. And it had an unmistakable scent of burning shoe leather about it. The water would be tepid, if not actually cold. The soap wouldn't lather. The bathroom would be clammy, and the dinner, when it was forthcoming, would be a ragout of God knew what, a potato that had gouged-out areas in it, a limp salad, and a compote of dried fruit. And Maria grumbled so about serving it in courses. It was positively useless to diagram for her the jumbled up indecencies of a table d'hote. Maria was almost worse than no help at all. Definitely a bourgeois.

Milli yawned and stretched her arms above her head. She arose and, going over to the windows, stood looking out. A shaft of sunlight broke through the clouds and angered the tiny charms that dangled from her "war bracelet." An airplane studded with rhinestones, a miniature cannon with gold-leaf wheels, a toy soldier whose diamond chip eyes winked red and blue and green in the sun as he twirled helplessly on his silver chain. Ten or twelve of these baubles hung from the bracelet and it is indicative of Milli's character that she had bought them as a gift to herself to "celebrate" the last Bastille Day.

The sun's watery radiance turned the slackening rain into shining strings of quicksilver and made a drowned seascape of the garden. The faun that once had been a fountain, gleamed wetly in the pale, unearthly light and about its feet in the cracked basin, the pelting raindrops danced and bubbled like antiphonic memories of long-gone grace notes. The flower heads were heavy with sodden, brown-edged petals and their stalks bent wearily

as if cognizant of the fact that their lives were held by a tenuous thread that was about to be snapped between the chill, biting teeth of an early frost.

Milli looked at the rain intermingled with sun and thought, the devil is beating his wife. That was what Savannah used to say, back in Pittsburgh. "The devil's beatin' his wife, sho nuff." Savannah, who made such luscious mince pies and cherry tarts, and whose baked hams were always brown and crunchy on top and stuck with cloves and criss-crossed with a knife so that the juice ran down in between the cracks and—Milli's culinary recollections suffered a complete collapse and her eyes opened very wide as they alighted on a head poking out inquisitively from the leafy seclusion of the tall hedge that bounded the garden.

Two brown hands pushed aside the foliage to allow a pair of broad, brown shoulders to come through.

Milli gave an infinitesimal gasp. A man was in her garden! A man who, judging from the visible portion of his excellent anatomy, had—literally—lost his shirt.

Instinctively, she opened her mouth to make some sort of an outcry. Whether she meant to call for aid, or to scare the interloper away, or merely to give vent to a belated exclamation of surprise, will forever be debatable for the object of her scrutiny chose that moment to turn his extraordinarily well-shaped head and his glance fixed itself on Milli. Milli's outcry died a-borning.

To begin with, it wasn't a man. It was a youth. And to end with, there was something about him, some queer, indefinable quality, that was absolutely fascinating.

He was, Milli thought, rather like a young panther, or a half-awakened leopard. He was, Milli admitted, entranced, beautiful. Perfectly, *beautiful.* As an animal is beautiful and, automatically, she raised her chin so that the almost unnoticeable pouch under it became one with the line of her throat.

The youth was unabashed. If the discovery of his presence in a private garden left him in a difficult position, he effectively concealed his embarrassment. He regarded Milli steadfastly, and unwaveringly, and admiringly, and Milli, like a mesmerized bird, watched the rippling play of his muscles beneath his skin as he shoved the hedge apart still farther to obtain a better view of his erstwhile hostess.

Confusedly, Milli thought that it was lucky that the windows were locked, and, in the same mental breath, what a pity, that they were.

The two peered at one another. Milli knew only that his hair was pasted flat to his head with the rain and that his arms shone like sepia satin, and his eyes were tawny and filled with a flickering inward fire that made suet pudding of her knees.

For a long moment they remained so—their eyes locked. Milli's like those of an amazed china doll's; his like those of an untamed animal that was slightly underfed and resented the resulting gastric disturbances. The kitchen door banged and Milli could hear Maria calling a neighborly greeting to someone as she emptied a bucket of water in the yard. At that instant the last vestiges of sun began to sink behind the horizon, and the youth was gone. There was just the garden, and the rain, and the hedge.

Dimly, as through a fog, Milli heard Maria come in, heard the latch shoot home, the metallic clatter of the bucket as she set it down under the sink and, from somewhere outside, the long, diminishingly mournful howl of a dog.

Milli shook herself out of her trance. She brushed a hand across her eyelids as if to clear them of cobwebs and, unbolting, one of the windows, went out into the garden. There was no one. Only a footprint by the hedge, a bare footprint filling in with water.

She went back into the house. Maria was there, turning on the lamps. She looked at Milli curiously and Milli realized that she must be an odd sight, indeed, her hair liberally besprinkled with raindrops, her shoes muddy, her dress streaked with moisture.

"I thought I saw someone out there, just now," she explained. "Someone looking in."

"The police, probably," Maria said dourly. "The police have no notion of privacy."

"No," Milli said. "No, it wasn't the police. Didn't I hear you go out a few moments ago?"

"I wasn't looking in," Maria said in a peevish voice. "For why should I look in? I have other things to do besides looking in the windows." She drew herself up to list vocally and with accompanying gestures the numberless things she had to do.

"Did you see anyone?" Milli asked quickly.

"Old Phillipe," Maria answered. "I saw old Phillipe. On his way to the inn in the pouring rain and he with a cough since last April. When one has a cough and it is raining, one does not look in windows. Anyway, Phillipe is too old. When one is as old as Phillipe one is no longer interested. Anyhow, his son was killed at Avignon. Phillipe would not look in the windows."

"You saw no one else?"

Maria's eyes narrowed. "Madame was expecting someone, no?"

"No," Milli said. "No, I just thought . . . it was nothing."

"If madame is expecting someone, perhaps it would be well to save the beverage for later in the evening?"

"I am expecting no one."

It was, Milli thought as she let the curling iron rest in the gaseous flame, next to impossible to tell which side of the fence Maria was on. She could easily be reporting things to *both* sides. One had to be careful. So very careful.

This chap in the garden, for example. He must have escaped from somewhere. That would account for the absence of clothes. He was a refugee of some sort. And refugees of any sort were dangerous. It was best to stick to the beaten path and those who trod thereon. But he was so beautiful! Like a stripling god. No more than twenty, surely. It was delightful to see again someone as young as twenty. It was—Milli swore fluently as the iron began to smoke; she waved it in the air to cool it and, testing it gingerly with a moistened fore-

finger, applied it to her coiffure—it was not only delightful, it was heavenly. It was, really, rather like one of those little, long ago, pink cocktails. It *did* something for one.

A faint aroma of singeing hair made itself manifest in the damp, wallpapery smelling room.

Milli considered the refugee from every angle as she ate her solitary dinner and, afterward, as she reclined on her chaise longue idly turning the pages of a book selected at random, and while she was disrobing for bed, and even when she was giving the underpart of her chin the regulation number of backhanded slaps, a ritual that as a rule occupied her entire attention.

Slipping into her dressing gown, she opened her window and leaned out, chin in hands, elbows on the sill. The moon rode in the sky—a hunted thing dodging behind wisps of tattered cloud, and the air was heavy and wet and redolent of dying leaves.

"The moon was a ghostly galleon," Milli quoted, feeling, somehow frail and immensely poetic. She smiled a sad, fragile smile in keeping with her mood and wondered if the refugee also was having a lonely rendezvous with the moon. Lying on his back in some hidden spot thinking, possibly, of— Her reverie was broken sharply by Maria's voice, shattering the stillness of the night. It was followed by a cascade of water.

"What on earth are you *doing!*" Milli called down exasperatedly.

"There was an animal out here," Maria yelled back, equally as exasperated. "Trampling in my mulch pile."

Milli started to say, "Don't be ridiculous, go to bed," but the sentence froze on her lips as she remembered the refugee. He had come back! Maria had thrown water on him! He had returned full of . . of—well, hope for refuge, maybe, and Maria, the dolt, had chased him away!

"Wait," she called frenziedly into the darkness. "Wait! Oh, please, wait!"

Maria, thinking the command was for her, had waited, although the "please" had astonished her somewhat. Muttering under her breath, she had led her strangely overwrought mistress into the kitchen garden and had pointed out with pardonable pride the footprints in her mulch pile. Padded footprints. With claws.

"I saw the eyes," she said, "great, gleaming, yellow ones shining in the light when I started to pull the scullery blinds. Luckily I had a pot of water handy and I jerked open the door and—"

But her mistress wasn't listening. In truth, for one originally so upset, she had regained her composure with remarkable rapidity.

"Undoubtedly, the Trudeau's dog," she said with a total lack of interest.

"The Trudeau's dog is a Pomeranian," Maria said determinedly.

"No matter," Milli said. "Go to bed, Maria."

Maria went, mumbling to herself a querulous litany in which the word Pomeranian was, ever and anon, distinguishable—and pronounced with expletive force.

Milli awakened to find her room bright with sun, which was regrettable as it drew attention to the pattern of the rug and the well-worn condition of the curtains. It, likewise, did various things to Milli Cushman's face, which were little short of libelous. Libelous, that is, after Milli had painted herself a new one with painstaking care and the touch of an inspired, if jaded, master.

Downstairs, she found her breakfast ready and, because of its readiness, a trifle cold. She also found Maria, while not openly weeping, puffy as to eyes, and pink as to nose, and quite snuffly—a state that Milli found deplorable in servants.

A series of sharp questions brought to light the fact that old Phillipe was dead. Old Phillipe, it seemed, was not only dead but a bit mangled. To make a long story short, old Phillipe had been discovered in a condition that bordered on the skeletal. Identification had been made through particles of clothing and a pair of broken spectacles.

"You mean to say he was *eaten!*" Milli cried, which caused Maria to go off into a paroxysm of near hysterics from which Milli gathered, obscurely, that Maria blamed herself for old Phillipe's untimely demise.

By degrees, Milli drew it out of her. The footprints in the mulch pile. The kettle of water. The withdrawal of the animal to more congenial surroundings. Surroundings, doubtless, that were adjacent to the inn from whence old Phillipe, subsequently, plodded homeward. The stealthy pad of marauding feet. The encounter. The shriek. The awful ensuing silence.

Maria's detail was so graphic that it made Milli slightly ill, although it didn't prevent her from being firm about the matter of the wolf.

"Nonsense," Milli said. "Ridiculous. A *wolf*. Preposterous."

Maria explained about the bloody footprints leading away from the scene of slaughter. Footprints much too large for a dog. *Enormous* footprints.

"No doubt it was an enormous dog," Milli said coldly. "The natural habitat of a wolf is a forest, not a paved street."

Maria opened her mouth to go even further into detail, but Milli effectively shut it for her by a reprimand that, like the porridge of the smallest of the three bears, was neither too hot nor too cold, but just right.

After all, Milli thought, old Phillipe was better off. In all probability, he hadn't suffered a great deal. Most likely he had died of shock first. One more, one less, what difference did it make. Especially when one was as old as old Phillipe. At least he had lived his life while *she*, with so much life yet to be lived, was embalmed in a wretched sort of a flypaper existence that adhered to every inch of her no matter how hard she pulled. That visa. She would have to see about it again tomorrow. And the tea supply was disastrously low. And this horrible toast made of horrible bread that was crumbly and dry and tasted of sawdust. And her last bottle of eau de cologne practically *gone*, and she *couldn't* eat this mess in front of her.

Milli got up and went into the parlor. She flung wide

the French windows and petulantly surveyed the garden. She had rented the place *because* of the garden—such a lovely setting for informal teas, she had thought, and impromptu chafing-dish suppers on the flagstones with candlelight and thin, graceful-stemmed glasses. She had pictured herself in appropriate attire, cutting flowers and doing whatever it was one did with peat moss, and now look at the thing. Just *look* at it!

Milli looked at it. Her breath went out of her. She drew it in again with an unbecoming wheeze. One hand flew to her throat.

In the garden, fast asleep, curled up in a ball under the hedge, was the refugee, all dappled with shadows and naked as the day he was born.

This time, it must be noted in all fairness, Milli didn't open her chops. If an outcry was in her, it wasn't strong enough to register on her reflexes. Her eyes blinked rapidly, as they always did when Milli was thinking fast and, when she recrossed the parlor and walked down the hallway into the kitchen, her heels made hard staccato sounds on the flooring, as they always did when Milli had reached a decision.

Milli's decision made Maria as happy as could be, under the circumstances, and ten minutes later, reticule in hand, Maria departed for the domicile of her married niece's husband's aunt who was a friend of old Phillipe's widow and, consequently, would be in possession of all the particulars and would more than appreciate a helping hand and an attentive ear over the week end.

Milli turned the key behind her. Lightly, she ran to the scullery closet and took down from a nail a pair of grass-stained pants that had belonged to a gardener who had been liquidated before he had had a chance to return for his garment. Carrying the trousers over her arm, she retraced her steps to the parlor and through the double French windows.

Quiet as she was, her unbidden guest was awake as soon as her foot touched the first flagstone. He didn't move a muscle. He just opened his eyes and watched her with the easy assurance of one who knows he can leave whenever he wants to and several jumps ahead of the nearest competitor.

Milli stopped. She held out the pants.

"For you," she said. She gave them a toss. The boy, his queer, light eyes watching her every movement, made no attempt to catch them.

"Put them on," Milli said. She hesitated. "Please," she said, adding, "I am your friend."

The boy sat up. Milli hastily turned her back.

"Tell me when you get them on," she ordered.

She waited, and waited, and waited, and, hearing not the faintest rustle, cautiously swiveled her head around. Once again she drew in her breath and the wheeze was very nearly an eek for, not six inches away, was her visitor—his lips pulled over his teeth in a rather disconcerting smile, his eyes like glittering nuggets of amber.

The thought raced through Milli's head that he was going to "spring" at her, as the boy's eyes enumerated her charms one by one. She promptly elevated her chin and tried to keep her consternation from becoming obvious.

The boy laughed softly. A laugh that, somehow, was like a musical sort of a snarl. He stepped back. He bowed. Mockingly.

"What are you doing in my garden?" Milli asked, thinking it best to put him in his place, first and foremost. It wouldn't do to let him get out of hand. So soon, any way.

"Sleeping," the boy said.

"Don't you have any place to sleep?"

"Yes. Many places. But I like this place."

"What happened to your clothes?"

The boy shrugged. He didn't answer.

"Are you a refugee?"

"In a way, I suppose; yes."

"You're hiding, aren't you?"

"Until you came out, I was simply sleeping. After I have eaten I sleep until a short while before sundown."

"You're not hungry?" Milli elevated her eyebrows in surprise.

"Not now." The boy let his glance rove fleetingly over his hostess' neck. "I will be later."

"What do you mean 'until a short while before sundown'? Have you been traveling by night?"

"Yes."

Milli made an ineffectual motion toward the trousers. "Wasn't it . . . . I mean, going around without any . . that is, I should think— Weren't you cold?"

"No."

"It's a wonder you didn't catch pneumonia."

The boy grinned. He patted his flat stomach. "Not pneumonia," he said. "But it wasn't much better. Old and stringy and without flavor."

Milli regarded him with a puzzled frown. She didn't like being "taken in." She decided to let it go.

"My name is Milli Cushman," she said. "You are more than welcome to stay here until you are rested. You won't be bothered. I have sent my maid away."

"You're most kind," the boy said with exaggerated politeness. "Until tonight will be sufficient." If he realized that Milli was expecting him to introduce himself, he gave no sign.

After a pause, she spoke, a shade irritably. "No doubt, you *do* have a name?"

"I have lots of names. Even Latin ones."

"Well, what is one? I can't just go about calling you 'you,' you know."

"You might call me Lupus," the boy said. of the Latin ones. It means wolf."

"Do they call you The Wolf!"

"Yes."

"How intriguing. But why?"

The boy smiled at her. "I daresay you'll find out," he said.

"You mean you're one of the ones who . . well, like the affair of that German officer last week . . . that is to say, in a manner of speaking, you're one of those who're *still* going at it hammer and tongs?"

"Tooth and nail," the boy said.

"It seems so *silly*," Milli said. "What *good* does it do. It doesn't scare them. It just makes them angrier. And that makes it harder on *us*."

"Oh, but it *does* scare them," the boy said with an ironic lilt to his voice. "It scares them to death. Or at any rate it helps." He yawned, his tongue curling out like a cat's. And, suddenly, he was sullen. He glared at Milli with remote hostility.

"I'm sleepy," he growled. "I'm tired of talking. I want to go to sleep. Go away."

"Come inside," Milli said. "You can have Maria's bed." She gave him her most delectable glance. The one that involved the upsweeping and downsweeping of her eyelashes with the slimmest trace of a roguish quirk about the lips.

"I won't disturb you," she said. "And, besides, you might be caught if you stay in the garden. There was a man killed last night by some kind of a creature, or so they say, and Maria is sure to spread the news abroad that she threw water at something, and police just *might* investigate, and it *could* be very awkward for us both. Won't you come in, please?"

The boy looked at her in surly silence.

"Please, Lupus. For me?"

Once more he laughed softly. And this time the laugh was definitely a snarl. He reached out and pinched her. "For you, I will."

It was, Milli thought, not at all a flirtatious pinch. It was the kind of pinch her father used to give chickens to see if they were filled out in the proper places.

But Lupus wouldn't sleep in Maria's bed. He curled up on the floor of the parlor. Which, Milli thought, was just as well. It would save remaking Maria's bed so Maria wouldn't notice anything.

While her caller slept, Milli busied herself with pots and pans in the kitchen. It was tedious, but worth it. Tonight, there would be supper on the flagstones, with candles, and starlight, and all the accessories. A chance like this might not come her way for many another moon. She was resolved to make the most of it. As Savannah would have said, she was going to "do herself proud." For Lupus, the best was none too good. She nibbled a sandwich for luncheon, not wanting to spoil her appetite —not waking Lupus, for fear of spoiling his.

She got out her precious hoard of condiments. She scanned the fine printed directions on boxes. Meticulously she read the instructive leaflet inclosed in her paper bag of tanbarky appearing flour. She took off her bracelet, rolled up her sleeves, and went to work—humming happily to herself, a thing which she hadn't done for months.

She scraped, peeled, measured, sifted, chopped, stirred, beat and folded. Some fairly creditable muffins emerged from under her unaccustomed and amateurish fingers, a dessert that wasn't bad at all, and a salad that managed to give the impression of actually *being* a salad, which bordered on the miraculous.

The day slowly drew to a close and Milli was quite startled to find the hours had passed with such swiftness. So swiftly, that her initial awareness of their passing was caused by the advent of a patently ill-humored Lupus.

"Oh, dear," Milli said, "I didn't realize . . . is it late?"

"No," Lupus said. "It's growing early. The sun is going down."

"Are you hungry? I'm fixing some things I think will be rather good."

"I'm ravenous," Lupus said. "Let's go watch the sunset."

Milli put her hands up to her coiffure, coquettishly, allowing her sleeves to fall away from her round, white arms.

"Wait till I fix my hair. I must be a sight."

"You are," Lupus agreed, his eyes glistening. "And I won't have to wait much longer." Effortlessly he moved across and stood over Milli, devouring her with an all-encompassing gaze.

"Won't you have one of these," Milli asked hurriedly, hoping his impetuosity wouldn't brim over *too* abruptly. She shoved a box of liqueur-filled chocolates at him. "There's no such thing as a cocktail any more. Come along, we'll eat them on the sofa. It's . . . it's cozier."

But Lupus wasn't interested in the chocolates. In the parlor he stretched his long, supple length on the floor and contemplated the garden, ablaze in the last rays of a dying sun.

Milli plopped down beside him and began to rub his back, gently with long, smooth, even strokes. Lupus rolled his head over in lazy, indifferent pleasure, and looked up at her with a hunger that would have been voluptuous, if it hadn't been so stark.

"Do you like that?" Milli whispered.

For a reply, Lupus opened his mouth and yawned. And into it Milli dropped a chocolate, while at the same instant she jabbed him savagely with a hairpin.

The boy sucked in his breath with a pained howl, and a full eight minutes before the sun went down, Lupus had neatly choked to death on a chocolate whose liqueur-filled insides contained a silver bullet from Milli Cushman's "war bracelet."

It had been, Milli told herself later, a near thing. And it would have been *ghastly* if it hadn't worked. But it *had* worked, tra la. Of course, it stood to reason that it *would*. After all, if, at death, a werewolf changed back into human form, why, logically, the human form would —if in close personal contact with a silver bullet *before* sundown—metamorphosis into a wolf.

It was marvelous that she'd happened to pick up "The Werewolf of Paris" yesterday—had given her an insight, so to speak, and it was *extremely* handy that she'd had all that butcher shop background.

Milli wiped her mouth daintily with a napkin. How divinely *full* she was. And with Maria gone she could have Lupus all to herself.

Down to the last, delicious morsel.

THE END.

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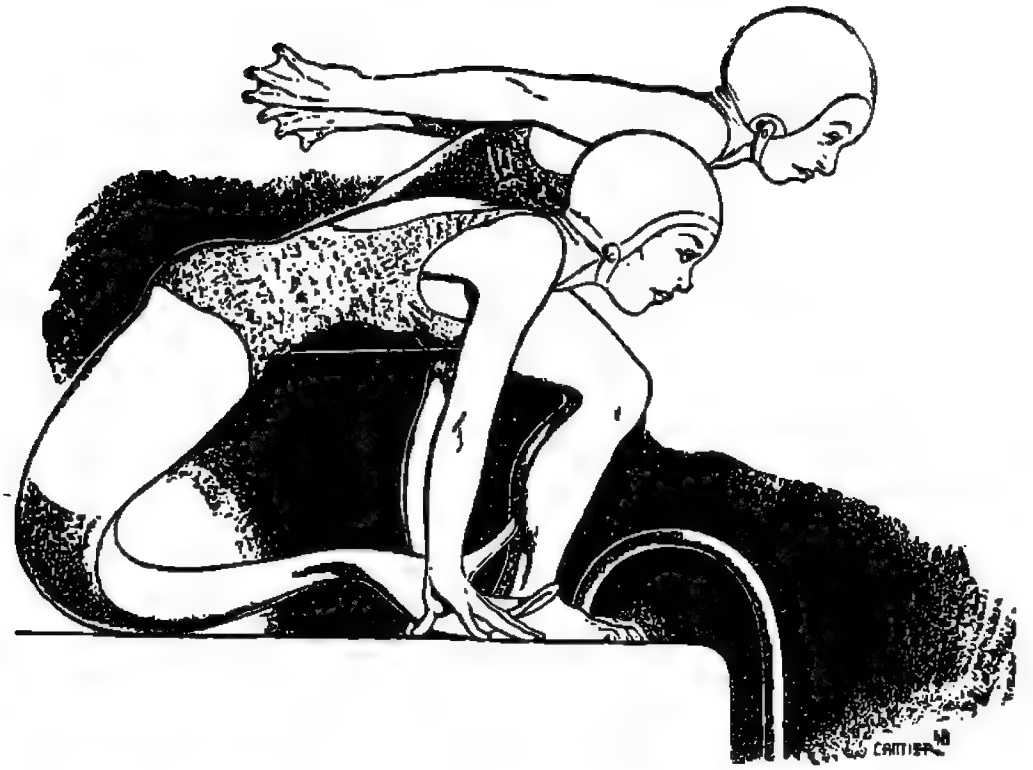

NOTHING IN THE RULES

BY L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

—said the contestants had to be human, so, if Coach A produced a web-fingered freak, and Coach B rung in a mermaid, A has to —?

Not many spectators turn out for a meet between two minor women's swimming clubs, and this one was no exception. Louis Connaught, looking up at the balcony, thought casually that the single row of seats around it was about half full, mostly with the usual bored-looking assortment of husbands and boy friends, and some of the Hotel Creston's guests who had wandered in for want of anything better to do. One of the bellboys was asking an evening-gowned female not to smoke, and she was showing irritation. Mr. Santalucia and the little Santalucias were there as usual to see mamma perform. They waved down at Connaught.

Connaught—a dark devilish-looking little man—glanced over to the other side of the pool. The girls were coming out of the shower rooms, and their shrill conversation was blurred by the acoustics of the pool room into a continuous buzz. The air was faintly steamy. The stout party in white duck pants was Laird, coach of the Knickerbockers and Connaught's arch rival. He saw Connaught and boomed: "Hi, Louie!" The words rattled from wall to wall with a sound like a stick being drawn swiftly along a picket fence. Wambach of the A. A. U. Committee, who was refereeing, came in with his overcoat still on and greeted Laird, but the booming reverberations drowned his words before they got over to Connaught.

Then somebody else came through the door; or rather, a knot of people crowded through it all at once, facing inward, some in bathing suits and some in street clothes. It was a few seconds before Coach Connaught

saw what they were looking at. He blinked and looked more closely, standing with his mouth half open.

But not for long. *"Hey!"* he yelled in a voice that made the pool room sound like the inside of a snare drum in use. "Protest! PROTEST! *You can't do that!"*

It had been the preceding evening when Herbert Laird opened his front door and shouted, "H'lo, Mark, come on in." The chill March wind was making a good deal of racket but not as much as all that. Laird was given to shouting on general principles. He was stocky and bald.

Mark Vining came in and deposited his brief case. He was younger than Laird—just thirty, in fact—with octagonal glasses and rather thin severe features that made him look more serious than he was, which was fairly serious.

"Glad you could come, Mark," said Laird. "Listen, can you make our meet with the Crestons tomorrow night?"

Vining pursed his lips thoughtfully. "I guess so. Loomis decided not to appeal, so I don't have to work nights for a few days anyhow. Is something special up?"

Laird looked sly. "Maybe. Listen, you know that Mrs. Santalucia that Louie Connaught has been cleaning up with for the past couple of years? I think I've got that fixed. But I want you along to think up legal reasons why my scheme's O. K."

"Why," said Vining cautiously. "What's your scheme?"

"Can't tell you now. I promised not to. But if Louie can win by entering a freak—a woman with webbed fingers—"

"Oh, look here, Herb, you know those webs don't really help her—"

"Yes, yes, I know all the arguments. You've already got more water-resistance to your arms than you've got muscle to overcome it with, and so forth. But I know Mrs. Santalucia has webbed fingers, and I know she's the best woman swimmer in New York. And I don't like it. It's bad for my prestige as a coach." He turned and shouted into the gloom: "Iantha!"

"Yes?"

"Come here, will you please? I want you to meet my friend Mr. Vining. Here, we need some light."

The light showed the living room as usual buried under disorderly piles of boxes of bathing suits and other swimming equipment, the sale of which furnished Herbert Laird with most of his income. It also showed a young woman coming in in a wheel chair.

One look gave Vining a feeling that, he knew, boded no good for him. He was unfortunate in being a push-over for any reasonably attractive girl, and at the same time being cursed with an almost pathological shyness where women were concerned. The facts that both he and Laird were bachelors and took their swimming seriously were the main ties between them.

This girl was more than reasonably attractive. She was, thought the dazzled Vining, a wow, a ten-strike, a direct sixteen-inch hit. Her smooth, rather flat features and high cheekbones had a hint of Asian or American Indian, and went oddly with her light-gold hair, which Vining could have sworn, had a faint greenish tinge. A blanket was wrapped around her legs.

He came out of his trance as Laird introduced the exquisite creature as "Miss Delfoiros."

Miss Delfoiros didn't seem exactly overcome. As she extended her hand, she said with a noticeable accent: "You are not from the newspapers, Mr. Vining?"

"No," said Vining. "Just a lawyer. I specialize in wills and probates and things. Not thinking of drawing up yours, are you?"

She relaxed visibly and laughed. "No. I 'ope I shall not need one for a long, long time."

"Still," said Vining seriously, "you never know—"

Laird bellowed: "Wonder what's keeping that sister of mine. Dinner ought to be ready. *Martha!"* He marched out, and Vining heard Miss Laird's voice, something about "—but Herb, I had to let those things cool down—"

Vining wondered with a great wonder what he should say to Miss Delfoiros. Finally he said, "Smoke?"

"Oh, no, thank you very much. I do not do it."

"Mind if I do?"

"No, not at all."

"Whereabouts do you hail from?" Vining thought the question sounded both brusque and silly. He never did get the hang of talking easily under this circumstances.

"Oh, I am from Kip—Cyprus, I mean. You know, the island."

"Really? That makes you a British subject, doesn't it?"

"Well . . . no, not exactly. Most Cypriots are, but I am not."

"Will you be at this swimming meet?"

"Yes, I think so."

"You don't"—he lowered his voice—"know what scheme Herb's got up his sleeve to beat La Santalucia?"

"Yes . . . no . I do not . . . what I mean is, I must not tell."

More mystery, thought Vining. What he really wanted to know was why she was confined to a wheel chair; whether the cause was temporary or permanent. But you couldn't ask a person right out, and he was still trying to concoct a leading question when Laird's bellow wafted in: "All right, folks, soup's on!" Vining would have pushed the wheel chair in, but before he had a chance, the girl had spun the chair around and was halfway to the dining room.

Vining said: "Hello, Martha, how's the schoolteaching business?" But he wasn't really paying much attention to Laird's capable spinster sister. He was gaping at Miss Delfoiros, who was quite calmly emptying a teaspoonful of salt into her water glass and stirring.

"What . . . what?" he gulped.

"I 'ave to," she said. "Fresh water makes me—like what you call drunk."

"Listen, Mark!" roared his friend. "Are you sure

you can be there on time tomorrow night? There are some questions of eligibility to be cleared up, and I'm likely to need you badly."

"Will Miss Delfoiros be there?" Vining grinned, feeling very foolish inside.

"Oh, sure. Iantha's out . . . say, listen, you know that little eighteen-year-old Clara Havranek? She did the hundred in one-oh-five yesterday. She's championship material. We'll clean the Creston Club yet—" He went on, loud and fast, about what he was going to do to Louie Connaught's girls. The while, Mark Vining tried to concentrate on his own food, which was good, and on Iantha Delfoiros, who was charming but evasive.

There seemed to be something special about Miss Delfoiros's food, to judge by the way Martha Laird had served it. Vining looked closely and saw that it had the peculiarly dead and clammy look that a dinner once hot but now cold has. He asked about it.

"Yes," she said, "I like it cold."

"You mean you don't eat *anything* hot?"

She made a face. "'Ot food? No, I do not like it. To us it is—"

"Listen, Mark! I hear the W. S. A. is going to throw a post-season meet in April for novices only—"

Vining's dessert lay before him a full minute before he noticed it. He was too busy thinking how delightful Miss Delfoiros's accent was.

When dinner was over, Laird said, "Listen, Mark, you know something about these laws against owning gold? Well, look here—" He led the way to a candy box on a table in the living room. The box contained, not candy, but gold and silver coins. Laird handed the lawyer several of them. The first one he examined was a silver crown, bearing the inscription "Carolus II Dei Gra" encircling the head of England's Merry Monarch with a wreath in his hair—or, more probably, in his wig. The second was an eighteenth-century Spanish dollar. The third was a Louis d'Or.

"I didn't know you went in for coin collecting, Herb," said Vining. "I suppose these are all genuine?"

"They're genuine all right. But I'm not collecting 'em. You might say I'm taking 'em in trade. I have a chance to sell ten thousand bathing caps, if I can take payment in those things."

"I shouldn't think the U. S. Rubber Company would like the idea much."

"That's just the point. What'll I do with 'em after I get 'em? Will the government put me in jail for having 'em?"

"You needn't worry about that. I don't think the law covers old coins, though I'll look it up to make sure. Better call up the American Numismatic Society—they're in the 'phone book—and they can tell you how to dispose of them. But look here, what the devil is this? Ten thousand bathing caps to be paid for in pieces-of-eight? I never heard of such a thing."

"That's it exactly. Just ask the little lady here." Laird turned to Iantha, who was nervously trying to signal him to keep quiet. "The deal's her doing."

"I did . . . did—" She looked as if she were going to cry. "'Erbert, you should not have said that. You see," she said to Vining, "we do not like to 'ave a lot to do with people. Always it causes us troubles."

"Who," asked Vining, "do you mean by 'we'?"

She shut her mouth obstinately. Vining almost melted. But his legal instincts came to the surface. If you don't get a grip on yourself, he thought, you'll be in love with her in another five minutes. And that might be a disaster. He said firmly: "Herb, the more I see of this business the crazier it looks. Whatever's going on, you seem to be trying to get me into it. But I won't let you before I know what it's all about."

"Might as well tell him, Iantha," said Laird. "He'll know when he sees you swim tomorrow, anyhow."

She said: "You will not tell the newspaper men, Mr. Vining?"

"No, I won't say anything to anybody."

"You promise?"

"Of course. You can depend on a lawyer to keep things under his hat."

"Under his—I suppose you mean not to tell. So, look." She reached down and pulled up the lower end of the blanket.

Vining looked. Where he expected to see feet, there was a pair of horizontal flukes, like those of a porpoise.

Louis Connaught's having kittens, when he saw what his rival coach had sprung on him, can thus be easily explained. First he doubted his own senses. Then he doubted whether there was any justice in the world.

Meanwhile Mark Vining proudly pushed Iantha's wheel chair in among the cluster of judges and timekeepers at the starting end of the pool. Iantha herself, in a bright green bathing cap, held her blanket around her shoulders, but the slate-gray tail with its flukes was smooth and the flukes were horizontal; artists who show mermaids with scales and a vertical tail fin, like a fish's, simply don't know their zoölogy.

"All right, all right," bellowed Laird. "Don't crowd around. Everybody get back to where they belong. Everybody, please."

One of the spectators, leaning over the rail of the balcony to see, dropped a fountain-pen into the pool. One of Connaught's girls, a Miss Black, dove in after it. Ogden Wambach, the referee, poked a finger at the skin of the tail. He was a well-groomed, gray-haired man.

"Laird," he said, "is this a joke?"

"Not at all. She's entered in the back stroke and all the free styles, just like any other club member. She's even registered with the A. A. U."

"But . . . but . . . I mean, is it alive? Is it real?"

Iantha spoke up. "Why do you not ask me those questions, Mr. . . . Mr. . . I do not know you—"

"Good grief," said Wambach. "It talks! I'm the referee, Miss—"

"Delfoiros. Iantha Delfoiros."

"My word. Upon my word. That means—let's see—Violet Porpoise-tail, doesn't it? *Delphis* plus *oura*—"

"You know Greek? Oh, 'ow nice!" She broke into a string of Romaic.

Wambach gulped a little. "Too fast for me, I'm afraid. And that's *modern* Greek, isn't it?"

"Why, yes. I am modern, am I not?"

"Dear me. I suppose so. But is that tail really real? I mean, it's not just a piece of costumery?"

"Oh, but yes." Iantha threw off the blanket and waved her flukes.

"Dear me," said Ogden Wambach. "Where are my glasses? You understand, I just want to make sure there's nothing spurious about this."

Mrs. Santalucia, a muscular-looking lady with a visible mustache and fingers webbed down to the first joint, said, "You mean I gotta swim against *her*?"

Louis Connaught had been sizzling like a dynamite fuse. "You can't do it!" he shrilled. "This is a woman's meet! I protest!"

"So what?" said Laird.

"But you can't enter a fish in a woman's swimming meet! Can you, Mr. Wambach?"

Mark Vining spoke up. He had just taken a bunch of papers clipped together out of his pocket, and was running through them.

"Miss Delfoiros," he asserted, "is not a fish. She's a mammal."

"How do you figure that?" yelled Connaught.

"*Look* at her."

"Um-m-m," said Ogden Wambach. "I see what you mean."

"But," howled Connaught, "she still ain't human!"

"There is a question about that, Mr. Vining," said Wambach.

"No question at all. There's nothing in the rules against entering a mermaid, and there's nothing that says the competitors have to be human."

Connaught was hopping about like an overwrought cricket. He was now waving a copy of the current A. A. U. swimming, diving, and water polo rules. "I still protest! Look here! All through here it only talks about two kind of meets, men's and women's. She ain't a woman, and she certainly ain't a man. If the Union had wanted to have meets for mermaids they'd have said so."

"Not a woman?" asked Vining in a manner that Juries learned meant a rapier thrust at an opponent. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Connaught. I looked the question up." He frowned at his sheaf of papers. "Webster's International Dictionary, Second Edition, defines a woman as 'any female person.' And it further defines 'person' as 'a being characterized by conscious apprehension, rationality, and a moral sense.'" He turned to Wambach. "Sir, I think you'll agree that Miss Delfoiros has exhibited conscious apprehension and rationality during her conversation with you, won't you?"

"My word . . . I really don't know what to say, Mr. Vining . . . I suppose she has, but I couldn't say—"

Horwitz, the scorekeeper, spoke up. "You might ask her to give the multiplication table." Nobody paid him any attention.

Connaught exhibited symptoms alarmingly suggestive of apoplexy. "But you can't— What are you talking about . . . conscious ap-ap—"

"Please, Mr. Connaught!" said Wambach. "When you shout that way I can't understand you because of the echoes."

Connaught mastered himself with a visible effort. Then he looked crafty. "How do I know she's got a moral sense?"

Vining turned to Iantha. "Have you ever been in jail, Iantha?"

Iantha laughed. "What a funny question, Mark! But of course, I have not."

"That's what *she* says," sneered Connaught. "How you gonna prove it?"

"We don't have to," said Vining loftily. "The burden of proof is on the accuser, and the accused is legally innocent until proved guilty. That principle was well established by the time of King Edward the First."

"That wasn't the kind of moral sense I meant," cried Connaught. "How about what they call moral turp-turp—You know what I mean."

"Hey," growled Laird, "what's the idea? Are you trying to cast— What's the word, Mark?"

"Aspersions?"

"—cast aspersions on one of my swimmers? You watch out, Louie. If I hear you be— What's the word, Mark?"

"Besmirching her fair name?"

"—besmirching her fair name I'll drown you in your own tank."

"And after that," said Vining, "we'll slap a suit on you for slander."

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" said Wambach. "Let's not have any more personalities, please. This is a swimming meet, not a lawsuit. Let's get to the point."

"We've made ours," said Vining with dignity. "We've shown that Iantha Delfoiros is a woman, and Mr. Connaught has stated, himself, that this is a woman's meet. Therefore, Miss Delfoiros is eligible. Q. E. D."

"Ahem," said Wambach. "I don't quite know—I never had a case like this to decide before."

Louis Connaught almost had tears in his eyes; at least he sounded as if he did. "Mr. Wambach, you can't let Herb Laird do this to me. I'll be a laughingstock."

Laird snorted. "How about your beating me with your Mrs. Santalucia? I didn't get any sympathy from you when people laughed at me on account of that. And how much good did it do me to protest against her fingers?"

"But," wailed Connaught, "if he can enter this Miss Delfurrus, what's to stop somebody from entering a trained sea lion or something? Do you want to make competitive swimming into a circus?"

Laird grinned. "Go ahead, Louie. Nobody's stopping you from entering anything you like. How about it, Ogden? Is she a woman?"

"Well . . . really . . . oh dear—"

"Please!" Iantha Delfoiros rolled her violet-blue eyes at the bewildered referee. "I should so like to swim in this nice pool with all these nice people!"

Wambach sighed. "All right, my dear, you shall!"

"Whoopee!" cried Laird, the cry being taken up by Vining, the members of the Knickerbocker Swimming Club, the other officials, and lastly the spectators. The noise in the inclosed space made sensitive eardrums wince.

"Wait a minute," yelped Connaught when the echoes had died. "Look here, page 19 of the rules. 'Regulation Costume, Women: Suits must be of dark color, with skirt attached. Leg is to reach—' and so forth. Right here it says it. She can't swim the way she is, not in a sanctioned meet."

"That's true," said Wambach. "Let's see—"

Horwitz looked up from his little score-sheet littered table. "Maybe one of the girls has a halter she could borrow," he suggested. "That would be *something*."

"Halter, phooey!" snapped Connaught. "This means a regular suit with legs and a skirt, and everybody knows it."

"But she hasn't got any legs!" cried Laird. "How could she get into—"

"That's just the point! If she can't wear a suit with legs, and the rules say you gotta have legs, she can't wear the regulation suit, and she can't compete! I gotcha that time! Ha-ha, I'm sneering!"

"I'm afraid not, Louie," said Vining, thumbing his own copy of the rule book. He held it up to the light and read: "'Note.—These rules are approximate, the idea being to bar costumes which are immodest, or will attract undue attention and comment. The referee shall have the power'—et cetera, et cetera. If we cut the legs out of a regular suit, and she pulled the rest of it on over her head, that would be modest enough for all practical purposes. Wouldn't it, Mr. Wambach?"

"Dear me—I don't know—I suppose it would."

Laird hissed to one of his pupils, "Hey, listen, Miss Havranek! You know where my suitcase is? Well, you get one of the extra suits out of it, and there's a pair of scissors in with the first-aid things. You fix that suit up so Iantha can wear it."

Connaught subsided. "I see now," he said bitterly, "why you guys wanted to finish with a 300-yard free style instead of a relay. If I'd'a' known what you were planning—and, you, Mark Vining, if I ever get in a jam, I'll go to jail before I hire you for a lawyer, so help me."

Mrs. Santalucia had been glowering at Iantha Delfoiros. Suddenly she turned to Connaught. "Thissa no fair. I swim against people. I no gotta swim against moimaids."

"Please, Maria, don't *you* desert me," wailed Connaught.

"I no swim tonight."

Connaught looked up appealingly to the balcony. Mr. Santalucia and the little Santalucias, guessing what was happening, burst into a chorus of: "Go on, mamma! You show them, mamma!"

"Aw right. I swim one, maybe two races. If I see I no got a chance, I no swim no more."

"That's better, Maria. It wouldn't really count if she beat you anyway." Connaught headed for the door, saying something about "telephone" on the way.

Despite the delays in starting the meet, nobody left the pool room through boredom; in fact the empty seats in the balcony were full by this time and people were standing up behind them. Word had got around the Hotel Creston that something was up.

By the time Louis Connaught returned, Laird and Vining were pulling the altered bathing suit on over Iantha's head. It didn't reach quite as far as they expected, having been designed for a slightly slimmer swimmer. Not that Iantha was fat. But her human part, if not exactly plump, was at least comfortably upholstered, so that no bones showed. Iantha squirmed around in the suit a good deal, and threw a laughing remark in Greek to Wambach, whose expression showed that he hoped it didn't mean what he suspected it did.

Laird said, "Now listen, Iantha, remember not to move till the gun goes off. And remember that you swim directly over the black line on the bottom, not between two lines."

"Are they going to shoot a gun? Oh, I am afraid of shooting!"

"It's nothing to be afraid of; just blank cartridges. They don't hurt anybody. And it won't be so loud inside that cap."

"Herb," said Vining, "won't she lose time getting off, not being able to make a flat dive like the others?"

"She will. But it won't matter. She can swim a mile in *four* minutes, without really trying."

Ritchey, the starter, announced the 50-yard free style. He called: "All right, everybody, line up." Iantha slithered off her chair and crawled over to the starting platform. The other girls were all standing with feet together, bodies bent forward at the hips, and arms pointing backward. Iantha got into a curious position of her own, with her tail bent under her and her weight resting on her hand and flukes.

"Hey! Protest!" shouted Connaught. "The rules say that all races, except back strokes, are started with dives. What kind of a dive do you call that?"

"Oh, dear," said Wambach. "What—"

"That," said Vining urbanely, "is a mermaid dive. You couldn't expect her to stand upright on her tail."

"But that's just it!" cried Connaught. "First you enter a non-regulation swimmer. Then you put a non-regulation suit on her. Then you start her off with a non-regulation dive. Ain't there anything you guys do like other people?"

"But," said Vining, looking through the rule book, "it doesn't say—here it is. 'The start in all races shall be made with a dive.' But there's nothing in the rules about what kind of dive shall be used. And the dictionary defines a dive simply as 'a plunge into water.' So if you

jump in feet first holding your nose, that's a dive for the purpose of the discussion. And in my years of watching swimming meets I've seen some funnier starting-dives than Miss Delfoiros's."

"I suppose he's right," said Wambach.

"O. K., O. K.," snarled Connaught. "But the next time I have a meet you and Herb, I bring a lawyer along too, see?"

Ritchey's gun went off. Vining noticed that Iantha flinched a little at the report, and perhaps was slowed down a trifle in getting off by it. The other girls' bodies shot out horizontally to smack the water loudly, but Iantha slipped in with the smooth, unhurried motion of a diving seal. Lacking the advantage of feet to push off with, she was several yards behind the other swimmers before she really got started. Mrs. Santalucia had taken her usual lead, foaming along with the slow strokes of her webbed hands.

Iantha didn't bother to come to the surface except at the turn, where she had been specifically ordered to come up so the judge of the turns wouldn't raise arguments as to whether she had touched the end, and at the finish. She hardly used her arms at all, except for an occasional flip of her trailing hands to steer her. The swift up-and-down flutter of the powerful tail-flukes sent her through the water like a torpedo, her wake appearing on the surface six or eight feet behind her. As she shot through the as yet unruffled waters at the far end of the pool on the first leg, Vining, who had gone around to the side to watch, noticed that she had the power of closing her nostrils tightly under water, like a seal or hippopotamus.

Mrs. Santalucia finished the race in the very creditable time of 29.8 seconds. But Iantha Delfoiros arrived, not merely first, but in the time of 8.0 seconds. At the finish she didn't reach up to touch the starting-platform, and then hoist herself out by her arms the way human swimmers do. She simply angled up sharply, left the water like a leaping trout, and came down with a moist smack on the concrete, almost bowling over a timekeeper. By the time the other contestants had completed the turn she was sitting on the platform with her tail curled under her. As the girls foamed laboriously down the final leg, she smiled dazzlingly at Vining, who had had to run to be in at the finish.

"That," she said, "was much fun, Mark. I am so glad you and 'Erbert put me in these races."

Mrs. Santalucia climbed out and walked over to Horwitz's table. That young man was staring in disbelief at the figures he had just written.

"Yes," he said, "that's what it says. Miss Iantha Delfoiros, 8.0; Mrs. Maria Santalucia, 29.8. Please don't drip on my score sheets, lady. Say, Wambach, isn't this a world's record or something?"

"My word!" said Wambach. "It's less than half the existing short-course record. Less than a third, maybe; I'd have to check it. Dear me. I'll have to take it up with the Committee. I don't know whether they'd allow it; I don't think they will, even though there isn't any specific rule against mermaids."

Vining spoke up. "I think we've complied with all the requirements to have records recognized, Mr. Wambach. Miss Delfoiros was entered in advance like all the others."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Vining, but don't you see, a record's a serious matter. No ordinary human being could ever come near a time like that."

"Unless he used an outboard motor," said Connaught. "If you allow contestants to use tail fins like Miss Delfurrus, you oughta let 'em use propellers. I don't see why these guys should be the only ones to be let bust rules all over the place, and then think up lawyer arguments why it's O. K. I'm gonna get me a lawyer, too."

"That's all right, Ogden," said Laird. "You take it up with the Committee, but we don't really care much about the records anyway, so long as we can lick Louie here." He smiled indulgently at Connaught, who sputtered with fury.

"I no swim," announced Mrs. Santalucia. "This is all crazy business. I no got a chance."

"Now, Maria," said Connaught, taking her aside, "just once more, won't you please? My reputation—" The rest of his words were drowned in the general reverberation of the pool room. But at the end of them the redoubtable female appeared to have given into his entreaties.

The 100-yard free style started in much the same manner as the 50-yard. Iantha didn't flinch at the gun this time, and got off to a good start. She skimmed along just below the surface, raising a wake like a tuna-clipper. These waves confused the swimmer in the adjacent lane, who happened to be Miss Breitenfeld of the Creston Club. As a result, on her first return leg, Iantha met Miss Breitenfeld swimming athwart her—Iantha's—lane, and rammed the unfortunate girl amidships. Miss Breitenfeld went down without even a gurgle, spewing bubbles.

Connaught shrieked: "Foul! Foul!" though in the general uproar it sounded like "Wow! Wow!" Several swimmers who weren't racing dove in to the rescue, and the race came to a stop in general confusion and pandemonium. When Miss Breitenfeld was hauled out it was found that she had merely had the wind knocked out of her and had swallowed considerable water.

Mark Vining, looking around for Iantha, found her holding onto the edge of the pool and shaking her head. Presently she crawled out, crying: "Is she 'urt? Is she 'urt? Oh, I am so sorree! I did not think there would be anybody in my lane, so I did not look ahead."

"See?" yelled Connaught. "See, Wambach? See what happens? They ain't satisfied to walk away with the races with their fish-woman. No, they gotta try to cripple my swimmers by butting their slats in. Herb," he went on nastily, "why dontcha get a pet swordfish? Then when you rammed one of my poor girls she'd be out of competition for good."

"Oh," said Iantha. "I did not mean it was an accident!"

"Accident my foot!"

"But it was. Mr. Referee, I do not want to bump people. My 'ead 'urts, and my neck also. You think I try to break my neck on purpose?" Iantha's altered suit had crawled up under her armpits, but nobody noticed particularly.

"Sure it was an accident," bellowed Laird. "Anybody could see that. And listen, if anybody was fouled it was Miss Delfoiros."

"Certainly," chimed in Vining. "She was in her own lane, and the other girl wasn't."

"Oh dear me," said Wambach. "I suppose they're right again. This'll have to be re-swum anyway. Does Miss Breitenfeld want to compete?"

Miss Breitenfeld didn't, but the others lined up again. This time the race went off without untoward incident. Iantha again made a spectacular leaping finish, just as the other three swimmers were halfway down the second of their four legs.

When Mrs. Santalucia emerged this time, she said to Connaught: "I no swim no more. That is final."

"Oh, but Maria—" It got him nowhere. Finally he said, "Will you swim in the races that she don't enter?"

"Is there any?"

"I think so. Hey, Horowitz, Miss Delfurrus ain't entered in the breast stroke, is she?"

Horowitz looked. "No, she isn't," he said.

"That's something. Say, Herb, how come you didn't put your fish-woman in the breast stroke?"

Vining answered for Laird. "Look at your rules, Louie. 'The feet shall be drawn up simultaneously, the knees bent and open,' et cetera. The rules for back stroke and free style don't say anything about how the legs shall be used, but those for breast stroke do. So no legs, no breast stroke. We aren't giving you a chance to make any legitimate protests."

"Legitimate protests!" Connaught turned away, sputtering.

While the dives were being run off, Vining, watching, became aware of an ethereal melody. First he thought it was in his head. Then he was sure it was coming from one of the spectators. He finally located the source; it was Iantha Delfoiros, sitting in her wheel chair and singing softly. By leaning nearer he could make out the words:

"Die schoenste Jungfrau sitzet
Dort ober wunderbar;
Ihr goldnes Geschmeide blitzet;
Sie kaemmt ihr goldenes Haar."

Vining went over quietly. "Iantha," he said. "Pull your bathing suit down, and don't sing."

She complied, looking up at him with a giggle. "But that is a nice song! I learn it from a wrecked German sailor. It is about one of my people."

"I know, but it'll distract the judges. They have to watch the dives closely, and the place is too noisy as it is."

"Such a nice man you are, Mark, but so serious!" giggled again.

Vining wondered at the subtle change in the mermaid's manner. Then a horrible thought struck him.

"Herb!" he whispered. "Didn't she say something last night about getting drunk on fresh water?"

Laird looked up. "Yes. She— The water in the pool's fresh! I never thought of that. Is she showing signs?"

"I think she is."

"Listen, Mark, what'll we do?"

"I don't know. She's entered in two more events, isn't she? Back stroke and 300-yard free style?"

"Yes."

"Well, why not withdraw her from the back stroke, and give her a chance to sober up before the final event?"

"Can't. Even with all her firsts we aren't going to win by any big margin. Louie has the edge on us in the dives, and Mrs. Santalucia'll win the breast stroke. In the events Iantha's in, if she takes first and Louie's girls take second and third, that means five points for us but four for him, so we have an advantage of only one point. And her world's record times don't give us any more points."

"Guess we'll have to keep her in and take a chance," said Vining glumly.

Iantha's demeanor was sober enough in lining up for the back stroke. Again she lost a fraction of a second in getting started by not having feet to push off with. But once she got started, the contest was even more one-sided than the free style races had been. The human part of her body was practically out of water, skimming the surface like the front half of a speedboat. She made paddling motions with her arms, but that was merely for technical reasons; the power was all furnished by the flukes. She didn't jump out onto the starting-platform this time; for a flash Vining's heart almost stopped as the emerald-green bathing cap seemed about to crash into the tiles at the end of the pool. But Iantha had judged the distance to a fraction of an inch, and braked to a stop with her flukes just before striking.

The breast stroke was won easily by Mrs. Santalucia, though her slow plodding stroke was less spectacular than the butterfly of her competitors. The shrill cheers of the little Santalucias could be heard over the general hubbub. When the winner climbed out, she glowered at Iantha and said to Connaught: "Louie, if you ever put me in a meet wit' moimaids again, I no swim for you again, never. Now I go home." With which she marched off to the shower room.

Ritchey was just about to announce the final event, the 300-yard free-style, when Connaught plucked his sleeve. "Jack," he said, "wait a second. One of my swimmers is gonna be delayed a coupla minutes." He went out a door.

Laird said to Vining: "Wonder what Louie's grinning about. He's got something nasty, I bet. He was 'phoning earlier, you remember."

"We'll soon see— What's that?" A hoarse bark

wafted in from somewhere and rebounded from the walls.

Connaught reappeared carrying two buckets. Behind him was a little round man in three sweaters. Behind the little round man gallumped a glossy California sea lion. At the sight of the gently rippling, jade-green pool the animal barked joyously and skidded into the water, swam swiftly about, and popped out onto the landing-platform, barking. The bark had a peculiarly nerve-racking effect in the echoing pool room.

Ogden Wambach seized two handfuls of his sleek gray hair and tugged. "Connaught!" he shouted. "What is that?"

"Oh, that's just one of my swimmers, Mr. Wambach."

"Hey, listen!" rumbled Laird. "We're going to protest this time. Miss Delfoiros is at least a woman, even if she's a kind of peculiar one. But you can't call *that* a woman."

Connaught grinned like Satan looking over a new shipment of sinners. "Didn't you just say to go ahead and enter a sea lion if I wanted to?"

"I don't remember saying—"

"Yes, Herbert," said Wambach, looking haggard. "You did say it. There didn't used to be any trouble in deciding whether a swimmer was a woman or not. But now that you've brought in Miss Delfoiros, there doesn't seem to be any place we can draw a line."

"But look here, Ogden, there is such a thing as going too far—"

"That's just what I said about you!" shrilled Connaught.

Wambach took a deep breath. "Let's not shout, please. Herbert, technically you may have an argument. But after we allowed Miss Delfoiros to enter, I think it would be only sporting to let Louis have his seal. Especially after you told him to get one if he could."

Vining spoke up. "Oh, we're always glad to do the sporting thing. But I'm afraid the sea lion wasn't entered at the beginning of the meet as is required by the rules. We don't want to catch hell from the Committee—"

"Oh, yes, she was," said Connaught. "See!" He pointed to one of Horowitz's sheets. "Her name's Alice Black, and there it is."

"But," protested Vining, "I thought *that* was Alice Black." He pointed to a slim dark girl in a bathing suit who was sitting on a window ledge.

"It is," grinned Connaught. "It's just a coincidence that they both got the same name."

"You don't expect us to believe *that!*"

"I don't care whether you believe or not. It's so. Ain't the sea lion's name Alice Black?" He turned to the little fat man, who nodded.

"Let it pass," moaned Wambach. "We can't take time off to get this animal's birth certificate."

"Well then," said Vining, "how about the regulation suit? Maybe you'd like to try to put a suit on your sea lion?"

"Don't have to. She's got one already. It grows on her. Yah, yah, yah, gotcha that time."

"I suppose," said Wambach, "that you *could* consider a natural sealskin pelt as equivalent to a bathing-suit."

"Sure you could. That's the pernt. Anyway the idea of suits is to be modest, and nobody gives a care about a sea lion's modesty."

Vining made a final point. "You refer to the animal as 'her,' but how do we know it's a female? Even Mr. Wambach wouldn't let you enter a male sea lion in a women's meet."

Wambach spoke: "How do you tell on a sea lion?"

Connaught looked at the little fat man. "Well, maybe we had better not go into that here. How would it be if I put up a ten-dollar bond that Alice is a female, and you checked on her sex later?"

"That seems fair," said Wambach.

Vining and Laird looked at each other. "Shall we let 'em get away with that, Mark?" asked the latter.

Vining rocked on his heels for a few seconds. Then he said, "I think we might as well. Can I see you outside a minute, Herb? You people don't mind holding up the race a couple of minutes more, do you? We'll be right back."

Connaught started to protest about further delay, but thought better of it. Laird presently reappeared looking unwontedly cheerful.

"'Erbert!" said Iantha.

"Yes?" he put his head down.

"I'm afraid—"

"You're afraid Alice might bite you in the water? Well, I wouldn't want that—"

"Oh, no, not afraid that way. Alice, poof! If she gets nasty I give her one with the tail. But I am afraid she can swim faster than me."

"Listen, Iantha, you just go ahead and swim the best you can. Twelve legs, remember. And don't be surprised, no matter what happens."

"What you two saying?" asked Connaught suspiciously.

"None of your business, Louie. Whatcha got in that pail? *Fish!* I see how you're going to work this. Wanta give up and concede the meet now?"

Connaught merely snorted.

The only competitors in the 300-yard free style race were Iantha Delfoiros and the sea lion, allegedly named Alice. The normal members of both clubs declared that nothing would induce them to get into the pool with the animal. Not even the importance of collecting a third-place point would move them.

Iantha got into her usual starting position. Beside her the little round man maneuvered Alice, holding her by an improvised leash made of a length of rope. At the far end, Connaught had placed himself and one of the buckets.

Ritchey fired his gun; the little man slipped the leash and said: "Go get 'em, Alice!" Connaught took a fish out of his bucket and waved it. But Alice, frightened by the shot, set up a furious barking and stayed where she was. Not till Iantha had almost reached the far end of the pool did Alice sight the fish at the other end. Then she slid off and shot down the water like a streak. Those who have seen sea lions merely loafing about a pool in a zoo or aquarium have no conception of how fast they can go when they try. Fast as the mermaid was, the sea lion was faster. She made two bucking jumps out of water before she arrived and oozed out onto the concrete. One gulp and the fish had vanished.

Alice spotted the bucket and tried to get her head into it. Connaught fended her off as best he could with his feet. At the starting end, the little round man had taken a fish out of the other bucket and was waving it, calling: "Here Alice!" Alice didn't get the idea until Iantha had finished her second leg. Then she went like the proverbial bat from hell.

The same trouble occurred at the starting end of the pool; Alice didn't see why she should swim twenty-five yards for a fish when there were plenty of them a few feet away. The result was that at the halfway-mark Iantha was two legs ahead. But then Alice, who was no dope as sea lions go, caught on. She caught up with and passed Iantha in the middle of her eighth leg, droozling out of the water at each end long enough to gulp a fish and then speeding down to the other end. In the middle of the tenth leg she was ten yards ahead of the mermaid.

At that point Mark Vining appeared through the door, running. In each hand he held a bowl of goldfish by the edge. Behind him came Miss Havranek and Miss Tufts, also of the Knickerbockers, both similarly burdened. The guests of the Hotel Creston had been mildly curious when a dark, severe-looking young man and two girls in bathing suits had dashed into the lobby and made off with the six bowls. But they had been too well-bred to inquire directly about the rape of the goldfish.

Vining ran down the side of the pool to a point near the far end. There he extended his arms and inverted the bowls. Water and fish cascaded into the pool. Miss Havranek and Miss Tufts did likewise at other points along the edge of the pool.

Results were immediate. The bowls had been large, and each had contained about six or eight fair-sized goldfish. The forty-odd bright-colored fish, terrified by their rough handling, darted hither and thither about the pool, or at least went as fast as their inefficient build would permit them. Alice, in the middle of her ninth leg, angled off sharply. Nobody saw her snatch the fish; one second it was there, and the next it wasn't. Alice doubled with a swirl of flippers and shot diagonally across the pool. Another fish vanished. Forgotten were her master and Louis Connaught and their buckets. This was much more fun. Meanwhile, Iantha finished her race, narrowly avoiding a collision with the sea lion on her last leg.

Connaught hurled the fish he was holding as far as he could. Alice snapped it up and went on hunting. Connaught ran toward the starting-platform, yelling: "Foul! Foul! Protest! Protest! Foul! Foul!"

He arrived to find the timekeepers comparing watches on Iantha's swim, Laird and Vining doing a kind of war dance, and Ogden Wambach looking like the March Hare on the twenty-eighth of February. "Stop!" cried the referee. "Stop, Louie! If you shout like that you'll drive me mad! I'm almost mad now! I know what you're going to say."

"Well . . . well why don't you do something, then? Why don't you tell these crooks where to head in? Why don't you have 'em expelled from the Union? Why don't you—"

"Relax, Louie," said Vining. "We haven't done anything illegal."

"*What?* Why, you dirty—"

"Easy, easy." Vining looked speculatively at his fist. The little man followed his glance and quieted somewhat. "There's nothing in the rules about putting fish into a pool. Intelligent swimmers, like Miss Delfoiros, knew enough to ignore them when they're swimming a race."

"But . . . what . . . why you—"

Vining walked off, leaving the two coaches and the referee to fight it out. He looked for Iantha. She was sitting on the edge of the pool, paddling in the water with her flukes. Beside her were four feebly flopping goldfish laid out in a row on the tiles. As he approached, she picked one up and put the front end of it in her mouth. There was a flash of pearly teeth and a spasmodic flutter of the fish's tail, and the front half of the fish was gone. The other half followed immediately.

At that instant Alice spotted the three remaining fish. The sea lion had cleaned out the pool, and was now slithering around on the concrete, barking and looking for more prey. She gallumped past Vining toward the mermaid.

Iantha saw her coming. The mermaid hoisted her tail out of the water, pivoted where she sat, swung the tail up in a curve, and brought the flukes down on the sea lion's head with a loud *spat*. Vining, who was twenty

feet off, could have sworn he felt the wind of the blow.

Alice gave a squawk of pain and astonishment and slithered away, shaking her head. She darted past Vining again, and for reasons best known to herself hobbled over to the center of argument and bit Ogden Wambach in the leg. The referee screeched and climbed up on Horowitz's table.

"Hey," said the scorekeeper. "You're scattering my papers!"

"I still say they're publicity-hunting crooks!" yelled Connaught, waving his copy of the rule book at Wambach.

"Bunk!" bellowed Laird. "He's just sore because we can think up more stunts than he can. He started it, with his web-fingered woman."

"I'm going mad!" screamed Wambach. "You hear? Mad, mad, mad! One more word out of either of you and I'll have you suspended from the Union!"

"Ow, ow, ow!" barked Alice.

Iantha had finished her fish. She started to pull the bathing suit down again; changed her mind, pulled it off over her head, rolled it up, and threw it across the pool. Halfway across it unfolded and floated down onto the water. The mermaid then cleared her throat, took a deep breath, and, in a clear ringing soprano, launched into the heart-wrenching strains of:

"Rheingold!
Reines Gold,
Wie lauter und hell
Leuchtest hold du uns!
Um dich, du klares—"

"Iantha!"

"What it is, Markee?" she giggled.

"I said, it's getting time to go home!"

"Oh, but I do not want to go home. I am having much fun.

"Nun wir klagen!
Gebt uns das Gold—"

"No, really, Iantha, we've got to go." He laid a hand on her shoulder. The touch made his blood tingle. At the same time it was plain that the remains of Iantha's carefuly husbanded sobriety had gone where the woodbine twineth. That last race in fresh water had been like three oversized Manhattans. Through Vining's head ran an absurd but apt paraphrase of an old song:

"What shall we do with a drunken mermaid
At three o'clock in the morning!"

"Oh, Markee, always you are so serious when people are 'aving fun. But if you say 'please' I will come."

"Very well, please come. Here, put your arm around my neck, and I'll carry you to your chair."

Such, indeed was Mark Vining's intention. He got one hand around her waist and another under her tail. Then he tried to straighten up. He had forgotten that Iantha's tail was a good deal heavier than it looked. In fact, that long and powerful structure of bone, muscle, and cartilage ran the mermaid's total weight up to the surprising figure of over two hundred and fifty pounds. The result of his attempt was to send himself and his burden headlong into the pool. To the spectators it looked as though he had picked Iantha up and then deliberately dived in with her.

He came up and shook the water out of his head. Iantha popped up in front of him.

"So!" she gurgled. "You are 'aving fun with Iantha! I think you are serious, but you want to play games! All right, I show you!" She brought her palm down smartly, filling Vining's mouth and nose with water. He struck out blindly for the edge of the pool. He was a powerful swimmer, but his street clothes hampered him. Another splash cascaded over his luckless head. He got his eyes clear in time to see Iantha's head go down and her flukes up.

"Markeeee!" The voice was behind him. He turned, and saw Iantha holding a large black block of soft rubber. This object was a plaything for users of the Hotel Creston's pool, and it had been left lying on the bottom during the meet.

"Catch!" cried Iantha gayly, and let drive. The block took Vining neatly between the eyes.

The next thing he knew he was lying on the wet concrete. He sat up and sneezed. His head seemed to be full of ammonia. Louis Connaught put away the smelling-salts bottle, and Laird shoved a glass containing a snort of whisky at him. Beside him was Iantha, sitting on her curled-up tail. She was actually crying.

"Oh, Markee, you are not dead? You are all right? Oh, I am so sorry! I did not mean to 'it you."

"I'm all right, I guess," he said thickly. "Just an accident. Don't worry."

"Oh, I am so glad!" She grabbed his neck and gave it a hug that made its vertebrae creak alarmingly.

"Now," he said, "if I could dry out my clothes. Louie, could you . . uh—"

"Sure," said Connaught, helping him up. "We'll put your clothes on the radiator in the men's shower room, and I can lend you a pair of pants and a sweatshirt while they're drying."

When Vining came out in his borrowed garments, he had to push his way through the throng that crowded the starting end of the pool room. He was relieved to note that Alice had disappeared. In the crowd Iantha in her wheel chair was holding court. In front of her stood a large man in a dinner jacket and a black cloak, with his back to the pool.

"Permit me," he was saying. "I am Joseph Clement. Under my management nothing you wished in the way of a dramatic or musical career would be beyond you. I heard you sing, and I know that with but little training even the doors of the Metropolitan would fly open at your approach."

"No, Mr. Clement. It would be nice, but tomorrow I 'ave to leave for 'ome." She giggled.

"But my dear Miss Delfoiros—where is your home, if I may presume to ask?"

"Cyprus."

"Cyprus? Hm-m-m—let's see, where's that?"

"You do not know where Cyprus is? You are not a nice man. I do not like you. Go away."

"Oh, but my dear, dear Miss Del—"

"Go away, I said. Scram."

"But—"

Iantha's tail came up and lashed out, catching the cloaked man in the solar plexus.

Little Miss Havranek looked at her teammate Miss Tufts, as she prepared to make her third rescue of the evening. "Poisonally," she said, "I am getting sick of pulling dopes out of this pool."

The sky was just turning gray the next morning when Laird drove his huge old town car out into the driveway of his house in the Bronx. Although he always drove himself, he couldn't resist the dirt-cheap prices at which second-hand town cars can be obtained. Now the car had the detachable top over the driver's seat in place, with good reason; the wind was driving a heavy rain almost horizontally.

He got out and helped Vining carry Iantha into the car. Vining got in the back with the mermaid. He spoke into the voice tube: "Jones Beach, Chauncey."

"Aye, aye, sir," came the reply. "Listen, Mark, you sure we remembered everything?"

"I made a list and checked it." He yawned. "I could have done with some more sleep last night. Are you sure you won't fall asleep at the wheel?"

"Listen, Mark, with all the coffee I got sloshing around in me, I won't get to sleep for a week."

"We certainly picked a nice time to leave."

"I know we did. In a coupla hours the place'll be covered six deep with reporters. If it weren't for the weather, they might be arriving now. When they do, they'll find the horse has stolen the stable door—that isn't what I mean, but you get the idea. Listen, you better pull down some of those curtains until we get out on Long Island."

"Righto, Herb."

Iantha spoke up in a small voice. "Was I very bad last night when I was drunk, Mark?"

"Not very. At least, not worse than I'd be if I went swimming in a tank of sherry."

"I am so sorry—always I try to be nice, but the fresh water gets me out of my head. And that poor Mr. Clement, that I pushed in the water—"

"Oh, he's used to temperamental people. That's his business. But I don't know that it was such a good idea on the way home to stick your tail out of the car and biff that cop under the chin with it."

She giggled. "But he looked so surprised!"

"I'll say he did! But a surprised cop is sometimes a tough customer."

"Will that make trouble for you?"

"I don't think so. If he's a wise cop, he won't report it at all. You know how the report would read: 'Attacked by mermaid at corner Broadway and Ninety-eighth Street, 11:45 p.m.' And *where* did you learn the unexpurgated version of 'Barnacle Bill the Sailor'?"

"A Greek sponge diver I met in Florida told me. 'E is a friend of us mer-folk, and he taught me my first English. 'E used to joke me about my Cypriot accent when we talked Greek. It is a pretty song, is it not?"

"I don't think 'pretty' is exactly the word I'd use."

"'Oo won the meet? I never did 'ear."

"Oh, Louie and Herb talked it over, and decided they'd both get so much publicity out of it that it didn't much matter. They're leaving it up to the A. A. U., who will get a first-class headache. For instance, we'll claim we didn't foul Alice, because Louie had already disqualified her by his calling and fish-waving. You see that's coaching, and coaching a competitor during an event is illegal.

"But look here, Iantha, why do you have to leave so abruptly?"

She shrugged. "My business with 'Erbert is over, and I promised to get back to Cyprus before my sister's baby was born."

"You don't lay eggs? But of course you don't. Didn't I just prove last night you were mammals?"

"Markee, what an idea! Anyway, I do not want to stay around. I like you and I like 'Erbert, but I do not like living on land. You just imagine living in water for yourself, and you get an idea. And if I stay, the newspapers come, and soon all New York knows about me. We mer-folk do not believe in letting the land men know about us."

"Why?"

"We used to be friends with them sometimes, and always it made trouble. And now they 'ave guns and go around shooting things a mile away, to collect them, my great-uncle was shot in the tail last year by some aviator man who thought he was a porpoise or something. We don't like being collected. So when we see a boat or an airplane coming, we duck down and swim away quick."

"I suppose," said Vining slowly, "that that's why there were plenty of reports of mer-folk up to a few centuries ago, and then they stopped, so that now people don't believe they exist."

"Yes. We are smart, and we can see as far as the land men can. So you do not catch us very often. That is why this business with 'Erbert, to buy ten thousand bathing caps for the mer-folk, 'as to be secret. Not even his company will know about it. But they will not care if they get their money. And we shall not 'ave to sit on rocks drying our 'air so much. Maybe later we can arrange to buy some good knives and spears the same way. They would be better than the shell things we use now."

"I suppose you get all these old coins out of wrecks?"

"Yes. I know of one just off . . . no, I must not tell you. If the land men know about a wreck, they come with divers. Of course, the very deep ones we do not care about, because we cannot dive down that far. We 'ave to come up for air, like a whale."

"How did Herb happen to suck you in on that swimming meet?"

"Oh, I promised him when he asked—when I did not know 'ow much what-you-call-it fuss there would be. When I found out, he would not let me go back on my

promise. I think he 'as a conscience about that, and that is why he gave me that nice fish spear."

"Do you ever expect to get back this way?"

"No, I do not think so. We 'ad a committee to see about the caps, and they chose me to represent them. But now that is arranged, and there is no more reason for me going out on land again."

He was silent for a while. Then he burst out: "Iantha, I just can't believe that you're starting off this morning to swim the Atlantic, and I'll never see you again."

She patted his hand. "Maybe you cannot, but that is so. Remember, friendships between my folks and yours always make people un'appy. I shall remember you a long time, but that is all there will ever be to it."

He growled something in his throat, looking straight in front of him.

She said: "Mark, you know I like you, and I think you like me. 'Erbert 'as a moving-picture machine in his house, and he showed me some pictures of 'ow the land folk live.

"These pictures showed a custom of the people in this country, when they like each other. It is called—kissing, I think. I should like to learn that custom."

"Huh? You mean *me?*" To a man of Vining's temperament, the shock was almost physically painful. But her arms were already sliding around his neck. Presently twenty firecrackers, six Roman candles, and a skyrocket seemed to go off inside him.

"Here we are, folks," called Laird. Getting no response, he repeated the statement more loudly. A faint and unenthusiastic "Yeal." came through the voice tube.

Jones Beach was bleak under the lowering March clouds. The wind drove the rain against the car windows.

They drove down the beach road a way, till the tall tower was lost in the rain. Nobody was in sight.

The men carried Iantha down onto the beach and brought the things she was taking. These consisted of a boxful of cans of sardines, with a strap to go over the shoulders; a similar but smaller container with her personal belongings, and the fish spear, with which she might be able to pick up lunch on the way.

Iantha peeled off her land-woman's clothes and pulled on the emerald bathing cap. Vining, watching her with the skirt of his overcoat whipping about his legs, felt as if his heart was running out of his damp shoes onto the sand.

They shook hands, and Iantha kissed them both. She squirmed down the sand and into the water. Then she was gone. Vining thought he saw her wave back from the crest of a wave, but in that visibility he couldn't be sure.

They walked back to the car, squinting against the drops. Laird said: "Listen, Mark, you look as if you'd just taken a right to the button."

Vining merely grunted. He had got in front with Laird, and was drying his glasses with his handkerchief, as if that were an important and delicate operation.

"Don't tell me you're hooked?"

"So what?"

"Well, I suppose you know there's absolutely nothing you can do about it."

"Herb!" Vining snapped angrily. "Do you have to point out the obvious?"

Laird, sympathizing with his friend's feelings, did not take offense. After they had driven a while, Vining spoke on his own initiative. "That," he said, "is the only woman I've ever known that made me feel at ease. I could talk to her."

Later, he said, "I never felt so mixed up in my life. I doubt whether anybody else ever did, either. Maybe I ought to feel relieved it's over. But I don't."

Pause. Then: "You'll drop me in Manhattan on your way back, won't you?"

"Sure, anywhere you say. Your apartment?

"Anywhere near Times Square will do. There's a bar there I like."

So, thought Laird, at least the normal male's instincts were functioning correctly in the crisis.

When he let Vining out on Forty-sixth Street, the young lawyer walked off into the rain whistling. The whistle surprised Laird. Then he recognized the tune as one that was written for one of Kipling's poems. But he couldn't, at the moment, think which one.

THE END.

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THE CLOAK

BY ROBERT BLOCH

The customer assured him the cloak was genuine, of course—

The sun was dying, and its blood spattered the sky as it crept into its sepulcher behind the hills. The keening wind sent the dry, fallen leaves scurrying toward the west, as though hastening them to the funeral of the sun.

"Nuts!" said Henderson to himself, and stopped thinking.

The sun was setting in a dingy red sky, and a dirty raw wind was kicking up the half-rotten leaves in a filthy gutter. Why should he waste time with cheap imagery?

"Nuts!" said Henderson, again.

It was probably a mood evoked by the day, he mused. After all, this was the sunset of Halloween. Tonight was the dreaded Allhallows Eve, when spirits walked and skulls cried out from their graves beneath the earth.

Either that, or tonight was just another rotten cold fall day. Henderson sighed. There was a time, he reflected, when the coming of this night meant something. A dark Europe, groaning in superstitious terror, dedicated this Eve to the grinning Unknown. A million doors had once been barred against the evil visitants, a million prayers mumbled, a million candles lit. There was something majestic about the idea, Henderson reflected. Life had been an adventure in those times, and men walked in terror of what the next turn of a midnight road might bring. They had lived in a world of demons and ghouls and elementals who sought their souls—and by Heaven, in those days a man's soul meant something. This new skepticism had taken a profound meaning away from life. Men no longer revered their souls.

"Nuts!" said Henderson again, quite automatically. There was something crude and twentieth-century about the coarse expression which always checked his introspective flights of fancy.

The voice in his brain that said "nuts" took the place of humanity to Henderson—common humanity which would voice the same sentiment if they heard his secret thoughts. So now Henderson uttered the word and endeavored to forget problems and purple patches alike.

He was walking down this street at sunset to buy a costume for the masquerade party tonight, and he had much better concentrate on finding the costumer's before it closed than waste his time daydreaming about Halloween.

His eyes searched the darkening shadows of the dingy buildings lining the narrow thoroughfare. Once again he peered at the address he had scribbled down after finding it in the phone book.

Why the devil didn't they light up the shops when it got dark? He couldn't make out numbers. This was a poor, run-down neighborhood, but after all—

Abruptly, Henderson spied the place across the street and started over. He passed the window and glanced in. The last rays of the sun slanted over the top of the building across the way and fell directly on the window and its display. Henderson drew a sharp intake of breath.

He was staring at a costumer's window—not looking through a fissure into hell. Then why was it all red fire, lighting the grinning visages of fiends?

"Sunset," Henderson muttered aloud. Of course it was, and the faces were merely clever masks such as would be displayed in this sort of place. Still, it gave the

imaginative man a start. He opened the door and entered.

The place was dark and still. There was a smell of loneliness in the air—the smell that haunts all places long undisturbed; tombs, and graves in deep woods, and caverns in the earth, and—

"Nuts."

What the devil was wrong with him, anyway? Henderson smiled apologetically at the empty darkness. This was the smell of the costumer's shop, and it carried him back to college days of amateur theatricals. Henderson had known this smell of moth balls, decayed furs, grease paint and oils. He had played amateur Hamlet and in his hands he had held a smirking skull that hid all knowledge in its empty eyes—a skull, from the costumer's.

Well, here he was again, and the skull gave him the idea. After all, Halloween night it was. Certainly in this mood of his he didn't want to go as a rajah, or a Turk, or a pirate—they all did that. Why not go as a fiend, or a warlock, or a werewolf? He could see Lindstrom's face when he walked into the elegant penthouse wearing rags of some sort. The fellow would have a fit, with his society crowd wearing their expensive Elsa Maxwell take-offs. Henderson didn't greatly care for Lindstrom's sophisticated friends anyway; a gang of amateur Noel Cowards and horsy women wearing harnesses of jewels. Why not carry out the spirit of Halloween and go as a monster?

Henderson stood there in the dusk, waiting for someone to turn on the lights, come out from the back room and serve him. After a minute or so he grew impatient and rapped sharply on the counter.

"Say in there! Service!"

Silence. And a shuffling noise from the rear, then—an unpleasant noise to hear in the gloom. There was a banging from downstairs and then the heavy clump of footsteps. Suddenly Henderson gasped. A black bulk was rising from the floor!

It was, of course, only the opening of the trapdoor from the basement. A man shuffled behind the counter, carrying a lamp. In that light his eyes blinked drowsily.

The man's yellowish face crinkled into a smile.

"I was sleeping, I'm afraid," said the man, softly. "Can I serve you, sir?"

"I was looking for a Halloween costume."

"Oh, yes. And what was it you had in mind?"

The voice was weary, infinitely weary. The eyes continued to blink in the flabby yellow face.

"Nothing usual, I'm afraid. You see, I rather fancied some sort of monster getup for a par— Don't suppose you carry anything in that line?"

"I could show you masks."

"No. I meant, werewolf outfits, something of that sort. More of the authentic."

"So. The *authentic*."

"Yes." Why did this old dunce stress the word?

"I might—yes, I might have just the thing for you, sir." The eyes blinked, but the thin mouth pursed in a smile. "Just the thing for Halloween."

"What's that?"

"Have you ever considered the possibility of being a vampire?"

"Like Dracula?"

"Ah—yes, I suppose—Dracula."

"Not a bad idea. Do you think I'm the type for that, though?"

The man appraised him with that tight smile. "Vampires are of all types, I understand. You would do nicely."

"Hardly a compliment," Henderson chuckled. "But why not? What's the outfit?"

"Outfit? Merely evening clothes, or what you wear. I will furnish you with the authentic cloak."

"Just a cloak—is that all?"

"Just a cloak. But it is worn like a shroud. It is shroud-cloth, you know. Wait, I'll get it for you."

The shuffling feet carried the man into the rear of the shop again. Down the trapdoor entrance he went, and Henderson waited. There was more banging, and presently the old man reappeared carrying the cloak. He was shaking dust from it in the darkness.

"Here it is—the genuine cloak."

"Genuine?"

"Allow me to adjust it for you—it will work wonders, I'm sure."

The cold, heavy cloth hung draped about Henderson's shoulders. The faint odor rose mustily in his nostrils as he stepped back and surveyed himself in the mirror. The light was poor, but Henderson saw that the cloak effected a striking transformation in his appearance. His long face seemed thinner, his eyes were accentuated in the facial pallor heightened by the somber cloak he wore. It was a big, black shroud.

"Genuine," murmured the old man. He must have come up suddenly, for Henderson hadn't noticed him in the glass.

"I'll take it," Henderson said. "How much?"

"You'll find it quite entertaining, I'm sure."

"How much?"

"Oh. Shall we say five dollars?"

"Here."

The old man took the money, blinking, and drew the cloak from Henderson's shoulders. When it slid away he felt suddenly warm again. It must be cold in the basement—the cloth was icy.

The old man wrapped the garment, smiling, and handed it over.

"I'll have it back tomorrow," Henderson promised.

"No need. You purchased it. It is yours."

"But—"

"I am leaving business shortly. Keep it. You will find more use for it than I, surely."

"But—"

"A pleasant evening to you."

Henderson made his way to the door in confusion, then turned to salute the blinking old man in the dimness.

Two eyes were burning at him from across the counter—two eyes that did not blink.

"Good night," said Henderson, and closed the door quickly. He wondered if he were going just a trifle mad.

At eight, Henderson nearly called up Lindstrom to tell him he couldn't make it. The cold chills came the minute he put on the cloak, and when he looked at himself in the mirror his blurred eyes could scarcely make out the reflection.

But after a few drinks he felt better about it. He hadn't eaten, and the liquor warmed his blood. He paced the floor, attitudinizing with the cloak—sweeping it about him and scowling in what he thought was a ferocious manner. He was going to be a vampire all right! He called a cab, went down to the lobby. The driver came in, and Henderson was waiting, black cloak furled.

"I wish you to drive me," he said, in a low voice.

The cabman took one look at him in the cloak and turned pale.

"Whazzat?"

"I ordered you to come," said Henderson gutturally, while he quaked with inner mirth. He leered ferociously and swept the cloak back.

"Yeah, yeah. O. K."

The driver almost ran outside. Henderson stalked after him.

"Where to, boss—I mean, sir?"

The frightened face didn't turn as Henderson intoned the address and sat back.

The cab started with a lurch that set Henderson to chuckling deeply, in character. At the sound of the laughter the driver got panicky and raced his engine up to the limit set by the governor. Henderson laughed loudly, and the impressionable driver fairly quivered in his seat. It was quite a ride, but Henderson was entirely unprepared to open the door and find it slammed after him as the cabman drove hastily away without collecting a fare.

"I must look the part," he thought complacently, as he took the elevator up to the penthouse apartment.

There were three or four others in the elevator; Henderson had seen them before at other affairs Lindstrom had invited him to attend, but nobody seemed to recognize him. It rather pleased him to think how his wearing of an unfamiliar cloak and an unfamiliar scowl seemed to change his entire personality and appearance. Here the other guests had donned elaborate disguises—one woman wore the costume of a Watteau shepherdess, another was attired as a Spanish ballerina, a tall man dressed as Pagliacci, and his companion had donned a toreador outfit. Yet Henderson recognized them all; knew that their expensive habiliments were not truly disguises at all, but merely elaborations calculated to enhance their appearance. Most people at costume parties gave vent to supressed desires. The women showed off their figures, the men either accentuated their masculinity as the toreador did, or clowned it. Such things were pitiful; these conventional fools eagerly doffing their dismal business suits and rushing off to a lodge, or amateur theatrical, or mask ball in order to satisfy their starving imaginations. Why didn't they dress in garish colors on the street? Henderson often pondered the question.

Surely, these society folk in the elevator were fine-looking men and women in their outfits—so healthy, so red-faced, and full of vitality. They had such robust throats and necks. Henderson looked at the plump arms of the woman next to him. He stared, without realizing it, for a long moment. And then, he saw that the occupants of the car had drawn away from him. They were standing in the corner, as though they feared his cloak and scowl, and his eyes fixed on the woman. Their chatter had ceased abruptly. The woman looked at him, as though she were about to speak, when the elevator doors opened and afforded Henderson a welcome respite.

What the devil was wrong? First the cab driver, then the woman. Had he drunk too much?

Well, no chance to consider that. Here was Marcus Lindstrom, and he was thrusting a glass into Henderson's hand.

"What have we here? Ah, a bogyman!" It needed no second glance to perceive that Lindstrom, as usual at such affairs, was already quite bottle-dizzy. The fat host was positively swimming in alcohol.

"Have a drink, Henderson, my lad! I'll take mine from the bottle. That outfit of yours gave me a shock. Where'd you get the make-up?"

"Make-up? I'm not wearing any make-up."

"Oh. So you're not. How . . . silly of me."

Henderson wondered if he were crazy. Had Lindstrom really drawn back? Were his eyes actually filled with a certain dismay?

"I'll . . . I'll see you later," babbled Lindstrom, edging away and quickly turning to the other arrivals. Henderson watched the back of Lindstrom's neck. It was fat and white. It bulged over the collar of his costume and there was a vein in it. A vein in Lindstrom's fat neck. Frightened Lindstrom.

Henderson stood alone in the anteroom. From the parlor beyond came the sound of music and laughter; party noises. Henderson hesitated before entering. He drank from the glass in his hand—Bacardi rum, and powerful. On top of his other drinks it almost made the man reel. But he drank, wondering. What was wrong with him and his costume? Why did he frighten people? Was he unconsciously acting his vampire role? That crack of Lindstrom's about make-up, now—

Acting on impulse, Henderson stepped over to the long panel mirror in the hall. He lurched a little, then stood in the harsh light before it. He faced the glass, stared into the mirror, and saw nothing.

He looked at himself in the mirror, and there was no one there!

Henderson began to laugh softly, evilly, deep in his throat. And as he gazed into the empty, unreflecting glass, his laughter rose in black glee.

"I'm drunk," he whispered. "I must be drunk. Mirror in my apartment made me blurred. Now I'm so

far gone I can't see straight. Sure I'm drunk. Been acting ridiculously, scaring people. Now I'm seeing hallucinations—or not seeing them, rather. Visions. Angels."

His voice lowered. "Sure, angels. Standing right in back of me, now. Hello, angel."

"Hello."

Henderson whirled. There she stood, in the dark cloak, her hair a shimmering halo above her white, proud face; her eyes celestial blue, and her lips infernal red.

"Are you real?" asked Henderson, gently. "Or am I a fool to believe in miracles?"

"This miracle's name is Sheila Darrly, and it would like to powder its nose if you please."

"Kindly use this mirror through the courtesy of Stephen Henderson," replied the cloaked man, with a grin. He stepped back a ways, eyes intent.

The girl turned her head and favored him with a slow, impish smile. "Haven't you ever seen powder used before?" she asked.

"Didn't know angels indulged in cosmetics," Henderson replied. "But then there's a lot I don't know about angels. From now on I shall make them a special study of mine. There's so much I want to find out. So you'll probably find me following you around with a notebook all evening."

"Notebooks for a vampire?"

"Oh, but I'm a very intelligent vampire—not one of those backwoods Transylvanian types. You'll find me charming, I'm sure."

"Yes, you look like the sure type," the girl mocked. "But an angel and a vampire—that's a queer combination."

"We can reform one another," Henderson pointed out. "Besides, I have a suspicion that there's a bit of the devil in you. That dark cloak over your angel costume; dark angel, you know. Instead of heaven you might hail from my home town."

Henderson was flippant, but underneath his banter cyclonic thoughts whirled. He recalled discussions in the past; cynical observations he had made and believed.

Once, Henderson had declared that there was no such thing as love at first sight, save in books or plays where such a dramatic device served to speed up action. He asserted that people learned about romance from books and plays and accordingly adopted a belief in love at first sight when all one could possibly feel was desire.

And now this Sheila—this blond angel—had to come along and drive out all thoughts of morbidity, all thoughts of drunkenness and foolish gazings into mirrors, from his mind; had to send him madly plunging into dreams of red lips, ethereal blue eyes and slim white arms.

Something of his feelings had swept into his eyes, and as the girl gazed up at him she felt the truth.

"Well," she breathed, "I hope the inspection pleases."

"A miracle of understatement, that. But there was something I wanted to find out particularly about divinity. Do angels dance?"

"Tactful vampire! The next room?"

Arm in arm they entered the parlor. The merrymakers were in full swing. Liquor had already pitched gaiety at its height, but there was no dancing any longer. Boisterous little grouped couples laughed arm in arm about the room. The usual party gagsters were performing their antics in corners. The superficial atmosphere, which Henderson detested, was fully in evidence.

It was reaction which made Henderson draw himself up to full height and sweep the cloak about his shoulders. Reaction brought the scowl to his pale face, caused him to stalk along in brooding silence. Sheila seemed to regard this as a great joke.

"Pull a vampire act on them," she giggled, clutching his arm. Henderson accordingly scowled at the couples, sneered horrendously at the women. And his progress was marked by the turning of heads, the abrupt cessation of chatter. He walked through the long room like Red Death incarnate. Whispers trailed in his wake.

"Who is that man?"

"We came up with him in the elevator, and he—"

"His eyes—"

"Vampire!"

"Hello, Dracula!" It was Marcus Lindstrom and a sullen-looking brunette in Cleopatra costume who lurched toward Henderson. Host Linstrom could scarcely stand, and his companion in cups was equally at a loss. Henderson liked the man when sober at the club, but his behavior at parties had always irritated him. Lindstrom was particularly objectionable in his present condition—it made him boorish.

"M' dear, I want you t' meet a very dear friend of mine. Yessir, it being Halloween and all, I invited Count Dracula here, t'gether with his daughter. Asked his grandmother, but she's busy tonight at a Black Sabbath—along with Aunt Jemima. Ha! Count, meet my little playmate."

The woman leered up at Henderson.

"Oooh Dracula, what big eyes you have! Oooh, what big teeth you have! Ooooh—"

"Really, Marcus," Henderson protested. But the host had turned and shouted to the room.

"Folks, meet the real goods—only genuine living vampire in captivity! Dracula Henderson, only existing vampire with false teeth."

In any other circumstance Henderson would have given Lindstrom a quick, efficient punch on the jaw. But Sheila was at his side, it was a public gathering; better to humor the man's clumsy jest. Why not be a vampire?

Smiling quickly at the girl, Henderson drew himself erect, faced the crowd, and frowned. His hands brushed the cloak. Funny, it still felt cold. Looking down he noticed for the first time that it was a little dirty at the edges; muddy or dusty. But the cold silk slid through his fingers as he drew it across his breast with one long hand. The feeling seemed to inspire him. He opened his eyes wide and let them blaze. His mouth opened. A sense of dramatic power filled him. And he looked at Marcus Lindstrom's soft, fat neck with the vein stand-

ing in the whiteness. He looked at the neck, saw the crowd watching him, and then the impulse seized him. He turned, eyes on that creasy neck—that wabbling, creasy neck of the fat man.

Hands darted out. Lindstrom squeaked like a frightened rat. He was a plump, sleek white rat, bursting with blood. Vampires liked blood. Blood from the rat, from the neck of the rat, from the vein in the neck of the squeaking rat.

"Warm blood."

The deep voice was Henderson's own.

The hands were Henderson's own.

The hands that went around Lindstrom's neck as he spoke, the hands that felt the warmth, that searched out the vein. Henderson's face was bending for the neck, and, as Lindstrom struggled, his grip tightened. Lindstrom's face was turning purple. Blood was rushing to his head. That was good. Blood!

Henderson's mouth opened. He felt the air on his teeth. He bent down toward that fat neck, and then—

"Stop! That's plenty!"

The voice, the cooling voice of Sheila. Her fingers on his arm. Henderson looked up, startled. He released Lindstrom, who sagged with open mouth.

The crowd was staring, and their mouths were all shaped in the instinctive O of amazement.

Sheila whispered, "Bravo! Served him right—but you frightened him!"

Henderson struggled a moment to collect himself. Then he smiled and turned.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I have just given a slight demonstration to prove to you what our host said of me was entirely correct. I *am* a vampire. Now that you have been given fair warning, I am sure you will be in no further danger. If there is a doctor in the house I can, perhaps, arrange for a blood transfusion."

The O's relaxed and laughter came from startled throats. Hysterical laughter, in part, then genuine. Henderson had carried it off. Marcus Lindstrom alone still stared with eyes that held utter fear. *He* knew.

And then the moment broke, for one of the gagsters ran into the room from the elevator. He had gone downstairs and borrowed the apron and cap of a newsboy. Now he raced through the crowd with a bundle of papers under his arm.

"Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Big Halloween Horror! Extra!"

Laughing guests purchased papers. A woman approached Sheila, and Henderson watched the girl walk away in a daze.

"See you later," she called, and her glance sent fire through his veins. Still, he could not forget the terrible feeling that came over him when he had seized Lindstrom. Why?

Automatically, he accepted a paper from the shouting pseudo-newsboy. "Big Halloween Horror," he had shouted. What was that?

Blurred eyes searched the paper.

Then Henderson reeled back. That headline! It was an *Extra* after all. Henderson scanned the columns with mounting dread.

"Fire in costumer's . . . shortly after 8 p. m. firemen were summoned to the shop of . . . flames beyond control . . . completely demolished . . . damage estimated at . . . peculiarly enough, name of proprietor unknown . . . skeleton found in—"

"No!" gasped Henderson aloud.

He read, reread *that* closely. The skeleton had been found in a box of earth in the cellar beneath the shop. The box was a coffin. There had been two other boxes, empty. The skeleton had been wrapped in a cloak, undamaged by the flames—

And in the hastily penned box at the bottom of the column were eyewitness comments, written up under scareheads of heavy black type. Neighbors had feared the place. Hungarian neighborhood, hints of vampirism, of strangers who entered the shop. One man spoke of a cult believed to have held meetings in the place. Superstition about things sold there—love philters, outlandish charms and weird disguises.

Weird disguises—vampires—cloaks—*his eyes!*

"This is an authentic cloak."

"I will not be using this much longer. Keep it."

Memories of these words screamed through Henderson's brain. He plunged out of the room and rushed to the panel mirror.

A moment, then he flung one arm before his face to shield his eyes from the image that was not there—the missing reflection. *Vampires have no reflections.*

No wonder he looked strange. No wonder arms and necks invited him. He had wanted Lindstrom. Good God!

The cloak had done that, the dark cloak with the stains. The stains of earth, grave-earth. The wearing of the cloak, the cold cloak, had given him the feelings of a true vampire. It was a garment accursed, a thing that had lain on the body of one undead. The rusty stain along one sleeve was blood.

Blood. It would be nice to see blood. To taste its warmth, its red life, flowing.

No. That was insane. He was drunk, crazy.

"Ah. My pale friend the vampire."

It was Sheila again. And above all horror rose the beating of Henderson's heart. As he looked at her shining eyes, her warm mouth shaped in red invitation, Henderson felt a wave of warmth. He looked at her white throat rising above her dark, shimmering cloak, and another kind of warmth rose. Love, desire, and a—hunger.

She must have seen it in his eyes, but she did not flinch. Instead her own gaze burned in return.

Sheila loved him, too!

With an impulsive gesture, Henderson ripped the cloak from about his throat. The icy weight lifted. He was free. Somehow, he hadn't wanted to take the cloak off, but he had to. It was a cursed thing, and in another minute he might have taken the girl in his arms, taken her for a kiss and remained to—

But he dared not think of that.

"Tired of masquerading?" she asked. With a similar gesture she, too, removed her cloak and stood revealed in the glory of her angel robe. Her blond, statuesque perfection forced a gasp to Henderson's throat.

"Angel," he whispered.

"Devil," she mocked.

And suddenly they were embracing. Henderson had taken her cloak in his arm with his own. They stood with lips seeking rapture until Lindstrom and a group moved noisily into the anteroom.

At the sight of Henderson the fat host recoiled.

"You—" he whispered. "You are—"

"Just leaving," Henderson smiled. Grasping the girl's arm, he drew her toward the empty elevator. The door shut on Lindstrom's pale, fear-filled face.

"Were we leaving?" Sheila whispered, snuggling against his shoulder.

"We were. But not for earth. We do not go down into my realm, but up—into yours."

"The roof garden?"

"Exactly, my angelic one. I want to talk to you against the background of your own heavens, kiss you amidst the clouds, and—"

Her lips found his as the car rose.

"Angel and devil. What a match!"

"I thought so, too," the girl confessed. "Will our children have halos or horns?"

"Both, I'm sure."

They stepped out onto the deserted rooftop. And once again it was Halloween.

Henderson felt it. Downstairs it was Lindstrom and his society friends, in a drunken costume party. Here it was night, silence, gloom. No light, no music, no drinking, no chatter which made one party identical with another; one night like all the rest. This night was individual here.

The sky was not blue, but black. Clouds hung like the gray beards of hovering giants peering at the round orange globe of the moon. A cold wind blew from the sea, and filled the air with tiny murmurings from afar.

It was also quite cold.

"Give me my cloak," Sheila whispered. Automatically, Henderson extended the garment, and the girl's body swirled under the dark splendor of the cloth. Her eyes burned up at Henderson with a call he could not resist. He kissed her, trembling.

"You're cold," the girl said. "Put on your cloak."

Yes, Henderson, he thought to himself. Put on your cloak while you stare at her throat. Then, the next time you kiss her you will want her throat and she will give it in love and you will take it in—hunger.

"Put it on, darling—I insist," the girl whispered. Her eyes were impatient, burning with an eagerness to match his own.

Henderson trembled.

Put on the cloak of darkness? The cloak of the grave, the cloak of death, the cloak of the vampire? The evil cloak, filled with a cold life of its own that transformed his face, transformed his mind?

"Here."

The girl's slim arms were about him, pushing the cloak onto his shoulders. Her fingers brushed his neck, caressingly, as she linked the cloak about his throat.

Then he felt it—through him—that icy coldness turning to a more dreadful heat. He felt himself expand, felt the sneer cross his face. This was Power!

And the girl before him, her eyes taunting, inviting. He saw her ivory neck, her warm slim neck, waiting. It was waiting for him, for his lips.

For his teeth.

No—it couldn't be. He loved her. His love must conquer this madness. Yes, wear the cloak, defy its power, and take her in his arms as a man, not as a fiend. He must. It was the test.

"Sheila, I must tell you this."

Her eyes—so alluring. It would be easy!

"Sheila, please. You read the paper tonight."

"Yes."

"I . . . I got my cloak there. I can't explain it. You saw how I took Lindstrom. I wanted to go through with it. Do you understand me? I meant to . . . to bite him. Wearing this thing makes me feel like one of those creatures. But I love you, Sheila."

"I know." Her eyes gleamed in the moonlight.

"I want to test it. I want to kiss you, wearing this cloak. I want to feel that my love is stronger than this—thing. If I weaken, promise me you'll break away and run, quickly. But don't misunderstand. I must face this feeling and fight it; I want my love for you to be that pure, that secure. Are you afraid?"

"No." Still she stared at him, just as he stared at her throat. If she knew what was in his mind!

"You don't think I'm crazy? I went to this costumer's—he was a horrible little old man—and he gave me the cloak. Actually told me it was a real vampire's. I thought he was joking, but tonight I didn't see myself in the mirror, and I wanted Lindstrom's neck, and I want you. But I must test it."

The girl's face mocked. Henderson summoned his strength. He bent forward, his impulses battling. For a moment he stood there under the ghastly orange moon, and his face was twisted in struggle.

And the girl lured.

Her odd, incredibly red lips parted in a silvery, chuckly laugh as her white arms rose from the black cloak she wore to circle his neck gently. "I know—I knew when I looked in the mirror. I knew you had a cloak like mine—got yours where I got mine—"

Queerly, her lips seemed to elude his as he stood frozen for an instant of shock. Then he felt the icy hardness of her sharp little teeth on his throat, a strangely soothing sting, and an engulfing blackness rising over him.

THE END.

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YESTERDAY WAS MONDAY

BY THEODORE STURGEON

The scene-shifters slipped — and a man woke up on Wednesday, thought yesterday was Monday. But Wednesday wasn't finished —

Harry Wright rolled over and said something spelled "Bazzzhha-a-awt" He chewed a bit on a mouthful of dry air and spat it out, opened one eye to see if it really would open, opened the other and closed the first, closed the second, swung his feet onto the floor, opened them again and stretched. This was a daily occurrence, and the only thing that made it remarkable at all was that he did it on a Wednesday morning, and—

Yesterday was Monday.

Oh, he knew it was Wednesday all right. It was partly that, even though he knew yesterday was Monday, there was a gap between Monday and now; and that must have been Tuesday. When you fall asleep and lie there all night without dreaming, you know, when you wake up, that time has passed. You've done nothing that you can remember; you've had no particular thoughts, no

way to gauge time, and yet you know that some hours have passed. So it was with Harry Wright. Tuesday had gone wherever your eight hours went last night.

But he hadn't slept through Tuesday. Oh no. He never slept, as a matter of fact, more than six hours at a stretch, and there was no particular reason for him doing so now. Monday was the day before yesterday; he had turned in and slept his usual stretch, he had awakened, and it was Wednesday.

It *felt* like Wednesday. There was a Wednesdayish feel to the air.

Harry put on his socks and stood up. He wasn't fooled. He knew what day it was. "What happened to yesterday?" he muttered. "Oh—yesterday was Monday." That sufficed until he got his pajamas off. "Monday," he mused, reaching for his underwear, "was quite a while back, seems as though." If he had been the worrying type, he would have started then and there. But he wasn't. He was an easygoing sort, the kind of man that gets himself into a rut and stays there until he is pushed out. That was why he was an automobile mechanic at twenty-three dollars a week; that's why he had been one for eight years now, and would be from now on, if he could only find Tuesday and get back to work.

Guided by his reflexes, as usual, and with no mental effort at all, which was also usual, he finished washing, dressing, and making his bed. His alarm clock, which never alarmed because he was of such regular habits, said, as usual, six twenty-two when he paused on the way out, and gave his room the once-over. And there was a certain something about the place that made even this phlegmatic character stop and think.

It wasn't finished.

The bed was there, and the picture of Joe Louis. There were the two chairs sharing their usual seven legs, the split table, the pipe-organ bedstead, the beige wallpaper with the two swans over and over and over, the tiny corner sink, the tilted bureau. But none of them were finished. Not that there were any holes in anything. What paint there had been in the first place was still there. But there was an odor of old cut lumber, a subtle, insistent air of building, about the room and everything in it. It was indefinable, inescapable, and Harry Wright stood there caught up in it, wondering. He glanced suspiciously around but saw nothing he could really be suspicious of. He shook his head, locked the door and went out into the hall.

On the steps a little fellow, just over three feet tall, was gently stroking the third step from the top with a razor-sharp chisel, shaping up a new scar in the dirty wood. He looked up as Harry approached, and stood up quickly.

"Hi," said Harry, taking in the man's leather coat, his peaked cap, his wizened, bright-eyed little face. "Whatcha doing?"

"Touch-up," piped the little man. "The actor in the third floor front has a nail in his right heel. He came in late Tuesday night and cut the wood here. I have to get it ready for Wednesday."

"This is Wednesday," Harry pointed out.

"Of course. Always has been. Always will be."

Harry let that pass, started on down the stairs. He had achieved his amazing bevinity by making a practice of ignoring things he could not understand. But one thing bothered him—

"Did you say that feller in the third floor front was an actor?"

"Yes. They're all actors, you know."

"You're nuts, friend," said Harry bluntly. "That guy works on the docks."

"Oh yes—that's his part. That's what he acts."

"No kiddin'. An' what does he do when he isn't acting?"

"But he— Well, that's all he does do! That's all any of the actors do!"

"Gee— I thought he looked like a reg'lar guy, too," said Harry. "An actor! 'Magine!"

"Excuse me," said the little man, "but I've got to get back to work. We mustn't let anything get by us, you know. They'll be through Tuesday before long, and everything must be ready for them."

Harry thought: this guy's crazy nuts. He smiled uncertainly and went down to the landing below. When he looked back the man was cutting skillfully into the stair, making a neat little nail scratch. Harry shook his head. This was a screwy morning. He'd be glad to get back to the shop. There was a '39 sedan down there with a busted rear spring. Once he got his mind on that he could forget this nonsense. That's all that matters to a man in a rut. Work, eat, sleep, pay day. Why even try to think anything else out?

The street was a riot of activity, but then it always was. But not quite this way. There were automobiles and trucks and buses around, aplenty, but none of them were moving. And none of them were quite complete. This was Harry's own field; if there was anything he didn't know about motor vehicles, it wasn't very important. And through that medium he began to get the general idea of what was going on.

Swarms of little men who might have been twins of the one he had spoken to were crowding around the cars, the sidewalks, the stores and buildings. All were working like mad with every tool imaginable. Some were touching up the finish of the cars with fine wire brushes, laying on networks of microscopic cracks and scratches. Some, with ball peens and mallets, were denting fenders skillfully, bending bumpers in an artful crash pattern, spider-webbing safety-glass windshields. Others were aging top dressing with high-pressure, needlepoint sandblasters. Still others were pumping dust into upholstery, sandpapering the dashboard finish around light switches, throttles, chokes, to give a finger-worn appearance. Harry stood aside as a half dozen of the workers scampered down the street bearing a fender which they riveted to a 1930 coupé. It was freshly blood-stained.

Once awakened to this highly unusual activity, Harry

stopped, slightly open-mouthed, to watch what else was going on. He saw the same process being industriously accomplished with the houses and stores. Dirt was being laid on plate-glass windows over a coat of clear sizing. Woodwork was being cleverly scored and the paint peeled to make it look correctly weather-beaten, and dozens of leather-clad laborers were on their hands and knees, poking dust and dirt into the cracks between the paving blocks. A line of them went down the sidewalk, busily chewing gum and spitting it out; they were followed by another crew who carefully placed the wads according to diagrams they carried, and stamped them flat.

Harry set his teeth and muscled his rocking brain into something like its normal position. "I ain't never seen a day like this or crazy people like this," he said, "but I ain't gonna let it be any of my affair. I got my job to go to." And trying vainly to ignore the hundreds of little, hard-working figures, he went grimly on down the street.

When he got to the garage he found no one there but more swarms of stereotyped little people climbing over the place, dulling the paint work, cracking the cement flooring, doing their hurried, efficient little tasks of aging. He noticed, only because he was so familiar with the garage, that they were actually *making* the marks that had been there as long as he had known the place. "Hell with it," he gritted, anxious to submerge himself into his own world of wrenches and grease guns. "I got my job; this is none o' my affair."

He looked about him, wondering if he should clean these interlopers out of the garage. Naw—not his affair. He was hired to repair cars, not to police the joint. Long as they kept away from him—and, of course, animal caution told him that he was far, far outnumbered. The absence of the boss and the other mechanics was no surprise to Harry; he always opened the place.

He climbed out of his street clothes and into coveralls, picked up a tool case and walked over to the sedan, which he had left up on the hydraulic rack yester— that is, Monday night. And that is when Harry Wright lost his temper. After all, the car was his job, and he didn't like having anyone else mess with a job he had started. So when he saw his job—his '39 sedan—resting steadily on its wheels over the rack, which was down under the floor, and when he saw that the rear spring was repaired, he began to burn. He dived under the car and ran deft fingers over the real wheel suspensions. In spite of his anger at this unprecedented occurrence, he had to admit to himself that the job had been done well. "Might have done it myself," he muttered.

A soft clank and a gentle movement caught his attention. With a roar he reached out and grabbed the leg of one of the ubiquitous little men, wriggled out from under the car, caught his culprit by his leather collar, and dangled him at arm's length.

"What are you doing to my job?" Harry bellowed.

The little man tucked his chin into the front of his shirt to give his windpipe a chance, and said, "Why, I was just finishing up that spring job."

"Oh. Sure you were just finishing up on that spring job," Harry whispered, choked with rage. Then, at the top of his voice, "Who told you to touch that car?"

"Who told me? What do you—Well, it just had to be done, that's all. You'll have to let me go. I must tighten up those two bolts and lay some dust on the whole thing."

"You must *what?* You get within six feet o' that car and I'll twist your head offn your neck with a Stillson!"

"But— It has to be done!"

"You won't do it! Why, I oughta—"

"Please let me go! It I don't leave that car the way it was Tuesday night—"

"When was Tuesday night?"

"The last act, of course. Let me go, or I'll call the district supervisor!"

"Call the devil himself. I'm going to spread you on the sidewalk outside; and heaven help you if I catch you near here again!"

The little man's jaw set, his eyes narrowed, and he whipped his feet upward. They crashed into Wright's jaw; Harry dropped him and staggered back. The little man began squealing, "Supervisor! Supervisor! Emergency!"

Harry growled and started after him; but suddenly, in the air between him and the midget workman, a long white hand appeared. The empty air was swept back, showing an aperture from the garage to blank, blind nothingness. Out of it stepped a tall man in a single loose-fitting garment literally studded with pockets. The opening closed behind the man.

Harry cowered before him. Never in his life had he seen such noble, powerful features, such strength of purpose, such broad shoulders, such a deep chest. The man stood with the backs of his hands on his hips, staring at Harry as if he were something somebody forgot to sweep up.

"That's him," said the little man shrilly. "He is trying to stop me from doing the work!"

"Who are you?" asked the beautiful man, down his nose.

"I'm the m-mechanic on this j-j—Who wants to know?"

"Iridel, supervisor of the district of Futura, wants to know."

"Where in hell did you come from?"

"I did not come from hell. I came from Thursday."

Harry held his head. "What *is* all this?" he wailed. "Why is today Wednesday? Who are all these crazy little guys? What happened to Tuesday?"

Iridel made a slight motion with his finger, and the little man scurried back under the car. Harry was frenzied to hear the wrench busily tightening bolts. He half started to dive under after the little fellow, but Iridel said, "Stop!" and when Iridel said, "Stop!" Harry stopped.

"This," said Iridel calmly, "is an amazing occurrence." He regarded Harry with unemotional curiosity. "An

actor on stage before the sets are finished. Extraordinary."

"What stage?" asked Harry. "What are you doing here anyhow, and what's the idea of all these little guys working around here?"

"You ask a great many questions, actor," said Iridel. "I shall answer them, and then I shall have a few to ask you. These little men are stage hands— I am surprised that you didn't realize that. They are setting the stage for Wednesday. Tuesday? That's going on now."

"Arrgh!" Harry snorted. "How can Tuesday be going on when today's Wednesday?"

"Today isn't Wednesday, actor."

"Huh?"

"Today is Tuesday."

Harry scratched his head. "Met a feller on the steps this mornin'—one of these here stage hands of yours. He said this was Wednesday."

"It *is* Wednesday. Today is Tuesday. Tuesday is today. 'Today' is simply the name for the stage set which happens to be in use. 'Yesterday' means the set that has just been used; 'Tomorrow' is the set that will be used after the actors have finished with 'today.' This is Wednesday. Yesterday was Monday; today is Tuesday. See?"

Harry said, "No."

Iridel threw up his long hands. "My, you actors are stupid. Now listen carefully. This is Act Wednesday, Scene 6:22. That means that everything you see around you here is being readied for 6:22 a. m. on Wednesday. Wednesday isn't a time; it's a place. The actors are moving along toward it now. I see you still don't get the idea. Let's see . . . ah. Look at that clock. What does it say?"

Harry Wright looked at the big electric clock on the wall over the compressor. It was corrected hourly and highly accurate, and it said 6:22. Harry looked at it amazed. "Six tw—but my gosh, man, that's what time I left the house. I walked here, an' I been here ten minutes already!"

Iridel shook his head. "You've been here no time at all, because there is no time until the actors make their entrances."

Harry sat down on a grease drum and wrinkled up his brains with the effort he was making. "You mean that this time proposition ain't something that moves along all the time? Sorta—well, like a road. A road don't go no place— You just go places along it. Is that it?"

"That's the general idea. In fact, that's a pretty good example. Suppose we say that it's a road; a highway built of paving blocks. Each block is a day; the actors move along it, and go through day after day. And our job here—mine and the little men—is to well, pave that road. This is the clean-up gang here. They are fixing up the last little details, so that everything will be ready for the actors."

Harry sat still, his mind creaking with the effects of information. He felt as if he had been hit with a lead pipe, and the shock of it was being drawn out infinitely. This was the craziest-sounding thing he had ever run into. For no reason at all he remembered a talk he had had once with a drunken aviation mechanic who had tried to explain to him how the air flowing over an airplane's wings makes the machine go up in the air. He hadn't understood a word of the man's discourse, which was all about eddies and chords and cambers and foils, dihedrals and the Bernouilli effect. That didn't make any difference; the things flew whether he understood how or not; he knew that because he had seen them. This guy Iridel's lecture was the same sort of thing. If there was nothing in all he said, how come all these little guys were working around here? Why wasn't the clock telling time? Where was Tuesday?

He thought he'd get that straight for good and all. "Just where is Tuesday?" he asked.

"Over there," said Iridel, and pointed. Harry recoiled and fell off the drum; for when the man extended his hand, it *disappeared!*

Harry got up off the floor and said tautly, "Do that again."

"What? Oh— Point toward Tuesday? Certainly." And he pointed. His hand appeared again when he withdrew it.

Harry said, "My gosh!" and sat down again on the drum, sweating and staring at the supervisor of the district of Futura. "You point, an' your hand—ain't," he breathed. "What direction is that?"

"It is a direction like any other direction," said Iridel. "You know yourself there are four directions—forward, sideward, upward, and"—he pointed again, and again his hand vanished—"*that* way!"

"They never told me that in school," said Harry. "Course, I was just a kid then, but—"

Iridel laughed. "It is the fourth dimension—it is *duration*. The actors move through length, breadth, and height, anywhere they choose to within the set. But there is another movement—one they can't control—and that is duration."

"How soon will they come . . . eh . . . here?" asked Harry, waving an arm. Iridel dipped into one of his numberless pockets and pulled out a watch. "It is now eight thirty-seven Tuesday morning," he said. "They'll be here as soon as they finish the act, and the scenes in Wednesday that have already been prepared."

Harry thought again for a moment, while Iridel waited patiently, smiling a little. Then he looked up at the supervisor and asked, "Hey—this 'actor' business—what's that all about?"

"Oh—that. Well, it's a play, that's all. Just like any play—put on for the amusement of an audience."

"I was to a play once," said Harry. "Who's the audience?"

Iridel stopped smiling. "Certain—Ones who may be amused," he said. "And now I'm going to ask you some questions. How did you get here?"

"Walked."

"You *walked* from Monday night to Wednesday morning?"

"Naw— From the house to here."

"Ah— But how did you get to Wednesday, six twenty-two?"

"Well I—Damfino. I just woke up an' came to work as usual."

"This is an extraordinary occurrence," said Iridel, shaking his head in puzzlement. "You'll have to see the producer."

"Producer? Who's he?"

"You'll find out. In the meantime, come along with me. I can't leave you here; you're too close to the play. I have to make my rounds anyway."

Iridel walked toward the door. Harry was tempted to stay and find himself some more work to do, but when Iridel glanced back at him and motioned him out, Harry followed. It was suddenly impossible to do anything else.

Just as he caught up with the supervisor, a little worker ran up, whipping off his cap.

"Iridel, sir," he piped, "the weather makers put .006 of one per cent too little moisture in the air on this set. There's three seventeenths of an ounce too little gasoline in the storage tanks under here."

"How much is in the tanks?"

"Four thousand two hundred and seventy-three gallons, three pints, seven and twenty-one thirty-fourths ounces."

Iridel grunted. "Let it go this time. That was very sloppy work. Someone's going to get transferred to Limbo for this."

"Very good, sir," said the little man. "Long as you know we're not responsible." He put on his cap, spun around three times and rushed off.

"Lucky for the weather makers that the amount of gas in that tank doesn't come into Wednesday's script," said Iridel. "If anything interferes with the continuity of the play, there's the devil to pay. Actors haven't sense enough to cover up, either. They are liable to start whole series of miscues because of a little thing like that. The play might flop and then we'd all be out of work."

"Oh," Harry oh-ed. "Hey, Iridel—what's the idea of that patchy-looking place over there?"

Iridel followed his eyes. Harry was looking at a corner lot. It was tree-lined and overgrown with weeds and small saplings. The vegetation was true to form around the edges of the lot, and around the path that ran diagonally through it; but the spaces in between were a plane surface. Not a leaf nor a blade of grass grew there; it was naked-looking, blank, and absolutely without any color whatever.

"Oh, that," answered Iridel. "There are only two characters in Act Wednesday who will use that path. Therefore it is as grown-over as it should be. The rest of the lot doesn't enter into the play, so we don't have to do anything with it."

"But— Suppose someone wandered off the path on Wednesday," Harry offered.

"He'd be due for a surprise, I guess. But it could hardly happen. Special prompters are always detailed to spots like that, to keep the actors from going astray or missing any cues."

"Who are they—the prompters, I mean?"

"Prompters? G.A.'s—Guardian Angels. That's what the script writers call them."

"I heard o' them," said Harry.

"Yes, they have their work cut out for them," said the supervisor. "Actors are always forgetting their lines when they shouldn't, or remembering them when the script calls for a lapse. Well, it looks pretty good here. Let's have a look at Friday."

"Friday? You mean to tell me you're working on Friday already?"

"Of course! Why, we work years in advance! How on earth do you think we could get our trees grown otherwise? Here—step in!" Iridel put out his hand, seized empty air, drew it aside to show the kind of absolute nothingness he had first appeared from, and waved Harry on.

"Y-you want me to go in there?" asked Harry diffidently.

"Certainly. Hurry, now!"

Harry looked at the section of void with a rather weak-kneed look, but could not withstand the supervisor's strange compulsion. He stepped through.

And it wasn't so bad. There were no whirling lights, no sensations of falling, no falling unconscious. It was just like stepping into another room—which is what had happened. He found himself in a great round chamber, whose roundness was touched a bit with the indistinct. That is, it had curved walls and a domed roof, but there was something else about it. It seemed to stretch off in that direction toward which Iridel had so astonishingly pointed. The walls were lined with an amazing array of control machinery—switches and ground-glass screens, indicators and dials, knurled knobs, and levers. Moving deftly before them was a crew of men, each looking exactly like Iridel except that their garments had no pockets. Harry stood wide-eyed, hypnotized by the enormous complexity of the controls and the ease with which the men worked among them. Iridel touched his shoulder. "Come with me," he said. "The producer is in now; we'll find out what is to be done with you."

They started across the floor. Harry had not quite time to wonder how long it would take them to cross that enormous room, for when they had taken perhaps a dozen steps they found themselves at the opposite wall. The ordinary laws of space and time simply did not apply in the place.

They stopped at a door of burnished bronze, so very highly polished that they could see through it. It opened and Iridel pushed Harry through. The door swung shut, Harry, panic-stricken lest he be separated from the only thing in this weird world he could begin to get used to, flung himself against this great bronze portal. It bounced him back, head over heels, into the middle of the floor. He rolled over and got up to his hands and knees.

He was in a tiny room, one end of which was filled by a colossal teakwood desk. The man sitting there re-

garded him with amusement. "Where'd you blow in from?" he asked; and his voice was like the angry bee sound of an approaching hurricane.

"Are you the producer?"

"Well, I'll be darned," said the man, and smiled. It seemed to fill the whole room with light. He was a big man, Harry noticed; but in this deceptive place, there was no way of telling how big. "I'll be most verily darned. An actor. You're a persistent lot, aren't you? Building houses for me that I almost never go into. Getting together and sending requests for better parts. Listening carefully to what I have to say and then ignoring or misinterpreting my advice. Always asking for just one more chance, and when you get it, messing that up too. And now one of you crashes the gate. What's your trouble, anyway?"

There was something about the producer that bothered Harry, but he could not place what it was, unless it was the fact that the man awed him and he didn't know why. "I woke up in Wednesday," he stammered, "and yesterday was Tuesday. I mean Monday. I mean—" He cleared his throat and started over. "I went to sleep Monday night and woke up Wednesday, and I'm looking for Tuesday."

"What do you want me to do about it?"

"Well—couldn't you tell me how to get back there? I got work to do."

"Oh—I get it," said the producer. "You want a favor from me. You know, some day, some one of you fellows is going to come to me wanting to give me something, free and for nothing, and then I am going to drop quietly dead. Don't I have enough trouble running this show without taking up time and space by doing favors for the likes of you?" He drew a couple of breaths and then smiled again. "However—I have always tried to be just, even if it is a tough job sometimes. Go on out and tell Iridel to show you the way back. I think I know what happened to you; when you made your exit from the last act you played in, you somehow managed to walk out behind the wrong curtain when you reached the wings. There's going to be a prompter sent to Limbo for this. Go on now—beat it."

Harry opened his mouth to speak, thought better of it and scuttled out the door, which opened before him. He stood in the huge control chamber, breathing hard. Iridel walked up to him.

"Well?"

"He says for you to get me out of here."

"All right," said Iridel. "This way." He led the way to a curtained doorway much like the one they had used to come in. Beside it were two dials, one marked in days and the other in hours and minutes.

"Monday night good enough for you?" asked Iridel.

"Swell," said Harry.

Iridel set the dials for 9:30 p. m. on Monday. "So long, actor. Maybe I'll see you again some time."

"So long," said Harry. He turned and stepped through the door.

He was back in the garage, and there was no curtained doorway behind him. He turned to ask Iridel if this would enable him to go to bed again and do Tuesday right from the start, but Iridel was gone.

The garage was a blaze of light. Harry glanced up at the clock— It said fifteen seconds after nine-thirty. That was funny; everyone should be home by now except Slim Jim, the night man, who hung out until four in the morning serving up gas at the pumps outside. A quick glance around sufficed. This might be Monday night, but it was a Monday night he hadn't known.

The place was filled with the little men again!

Harry sat on the fender of a convertible and groaned. "Now what have I got myself into?" he asked himself.

He could see that he was at a different place-in-time from the one in which he had met Iridel. There, they had been working to build, working with a precision and nicety that was a pleasure to watch. But here—

The little men were different, in the first place. They were tired-looking, sick, slow. There were scores of overseers about, and Harry winced with one of the little fellows when one of the men in white lashed out with a long whip. As the Wednesday crews worked, so the Monday gangs slaved. And the work they were doing was different. For here they were breaking down, breaking up, carting away. Before his eyes, Harry saw sections of paving lifted out, pulverized, toted away by the backload by lines of trudging, browbeaten little men. He saw great beams upended to support the roof, while bricks were pried out of the walls. He heard the gang working on the roof, saw patches of roofing torn away. He saw walls and roof both melt away under that driving, driven onslaught, and before he knew what was happening he was standing alone on a section of the dead white plain he had noticed before on the corner lot.

It was too much for his overburdened mind; he ran out into the night, breaking through lines of laden slaves, through neat and growing piles of rubble, screaming for Iridel. He ran for a long time, and finally dropped down behind a stack of lumber out where the Unitarian church used to be, dropped because he could go no farther. He heard footsteps and tried to make himself smaller. They came on steadily; one of the overseers rounded the corner and stood looking at him. Harry was in deep shadow, but he knew the man in white could see in the dark.

"Come out o' there," grated the man. Harry came out.

"You the guy was yellin' for Iridel?"

Harry nodded.

"What makes you think you'll find Iridel in Limbo?" sneered his captor. "Who are you, anyway?"

Harry had learned by this time. "I'm an—actor," he said in a small voice. "I got into Wednesday by mistake, and they sent me back here."

"What for?"

"Huh? Why— I guess it was a mistake, that's all."

The man stepped forward and grabbed Harry by the collar. He was about eight times as powerful as a hydraulic jack. "Don't give me no guff, pal," said the man.

"Nobody gets sent to Limbo by mistake, or if he didn't do somethin' up there to make him deserve it. Come clean, now."

"I didn't do nothin'," Harry wailed. "I asked them the way back, and they showed me a door, and I went through it and came here. That's all I know. Stop it, you're choking me!"

The man dropped him suddenly. "Listen, babe, you know who I am? Hey?" Harry shook his head. "Oh —you don't. Well, I'm Gurrah!"

"Yeah?" Harry said, not being able to think of anything else at the moment.

Gurrah puffed out his chest and appeared to be waiting for something more from Harry. When nothing came, he walked up to the mechanic, breathed in his face. "Ain't scared, huh? Tough guy, huh? Never heard of Gurrah, supervisor of Limbo an' the roughest, toughest son of the devil from Incidence to Eternity, huh?"

Now Harry was a peaceable man, but if there was anything he hated, it was to have a stranger breathe his bad breath pugnaciously at him. Before he knew it had happened, Gurrah was sprawled eight feet away, and Harry was standing alone rubbing his left knuckles—quite the most surprised of the two.

Gurrah sat up, feeling his face. "Why, you . . you hit me!" he roared. He got up and came over to Harry. "You hit me!" he said softly, his voice slightly out of focus in amazement. Harry wished he hadn't—wished he was in bed or in Futura or dead or something. Gurrah reached out with a heavy fist and—patted him on the shoulder. "Hey," he said, suddenly friendly, "you're all right. Heh! Took a poke at me, didn't you? Be damned! First time in a month o' Mondays anyone ever made a pass at me. Last was a feller named Orton. I killed 'im." Harry paled.

Gurrah leaned back against the lumber pile. "Dam'f I didn't enjoy that, feller. Yeah. This is a heck of a job they palmed off on me, but what can you do? Breakin' down—breakin' down. No sooner get through one job, workin' top speed, drivin' the boys till they bleed, than they give you the devil for not bein' halfway through another job. You'd think I'd been in the business long enough to know what it was all about, after more than eight hundred an' twenty million acts, wouldn't you? Heh. Try to tell *them* that. Ship a load of dog houses up to Wednesday, sneakin' it past backstage nice as you please. They turn right around and call me up. 'What's the matter with you, Gurrah? Them dog houses is no good. We sent you a list o' worn-out items two acts ago. One o' the items was dog houses. Snap out of it or we send someone back there who can read an' put you on a toteline.' That's what I get—act in and act out. An' does it do any good to tell 'em that my aid got the message an' dropped dead before he got it to me? No. Uh-uh. If I say anything about that, they tell me to stop workin' 'em to death. If I do that, they kick because my shipments don't come in fast enough."

He paused for breath. Harry had a hunch that if he kept Gurrah in a good mood it might benefit him. He asked. "What's your job, anyway?"

"Job?" Gurrah howled. "Call this a job? Tearin' down the sets, shippin' what's good to the act after next, junkin' the rest?" He snorted.

Harry asked, "You mean they use the same props over again?"

"That's right. They don't last, though. Six, eight acts, maybe. Then they got to build new ones and weather them and knock 'em around to make 'em look as if they was used."

There was silence for a time. Gurrah, having got his bitterness off his chest for the first time in literally ages, was feeling pacified. Harry didn't know how to feel. He finally broke the ice. "Hey, Gurrah— How'm I goin' to get back into the play?"

"What's it to me? How'd you— Oh, that's right, you walked in from the control room, huh? That it?"

Harry nodded.

"An' how," growled Gurrah, "did you get inta the control room?"

"Iridel brought me."

"Then what?"

"Well, I went to see the producer, and—"

"Th' *producer!* Holy— You mean you walked right in and—" Gurrah mopped his brow. "What'd he say?"

"Why—he said he guessed it wasn't my fault that I woke up in Wednesday. He said to tell Iridel to ship me back."

"An' Iridel threw you back to Monday." And Gurrah threw back his shaggy head and roared.

"What's so funny?" asked Harry, a little peeved.

"Iridel," said Gurrah. "Do you realize that I've been trying for fifty thousand acts or more to get something on that pretty ol' heel, and he drops you right in my lap. Pal, I can't thank you enough! He was supposed to send you back into the play, and instead o' that you wind up in yesterday! Why, I'll blackmail him till the end of time!" He whirled exultantly, called to a group of bedraggled little men who were staggering under a cornerstone on their way to the junkyard. "Take it easy, boys!" he called. "I got ol' Iridel by the short hair. No more busted backs! No more snotty messages!"

Harry, a little amazed at all this, put in a timid word. "Hey—Gurrah. What about me?"

Gurrah turned. "You? Oh. *Tel-e-phone!*" At his shout two little workers, a trifle less bedraggled than the rest, trotted up. One hopped up and perched on Gurrah's right shoulder; the other draped himself over the left, with his head forward. Gurrah grabbed the latter by the neck, brought the man's head close and shouted into his ear, "Give me Iridel!" There was a moment's wait, then the little man on his other shoulder spoke in Iridel's voice, into Gurrah's ear, "Well?"

"Hiyah, fancy pants!"

"Fancy— I beg your— Who is this?"

"It's Gurrah, you futuristic parasite. I got a couple things to tell you."

"Gurrah! How . . . *dare* you talk to me like that! I'll have you—"

"You'll have me in your job if I tell all I know. You're a wart on the nose of progress, Iridel."

"What is the meaning of this?"

"The meaning of this is that you had instructions sent to you by the producer an' you muffed them. Had an actor there, didn't you? He saw the boss, didn't he? Told you he was to be sent right back, didn't he? Sent him right over to me instead of to the play, didn't you? You're slippin, Iridel. Gettin' old. Well, get off the wire. I'm callin' the boss, right now."

"The boss? Oh—don't do that, old man. Look, let's talk this thing over. Ah . . . about that shipment of three-legged dogs I was wanting you to round up for me; I guess I can do without them. Any little favor I can do for you—"

"You'll damn well do, after this. You better, Goldilocks." Gurrah knocked the two small heads together, breaking the connection and probably the heads, and turned grinning to Harry. "You see," he explained, "that Iridel feller is a good supervisor, but he's a stickler for detail. He sends people to Limbo for the silliest little mistakes. He never forgives anyone and he never forgets a slip. He's the cause of half the misery back here, with his hurry up orders. Now things are gonna be different. The boss has wanted to give Iridel a dose of his own medicine for a long time now, but Irrie never gave him a chance."

Harry said patiently, "About me getting back now—"

"My fran'!" Gurrah bellowed. He delved into a pocket and pulled out a watch like Iridel's. "It's eleven forty on Tuesday," he said. "We'll shoot you back there now. You'll have to dope out your own reasons for disappearing. Don't spill too much, or a lot of people will suffer for it—you the most. Ready?"

Harry nodded; Gurrah swept out a hand and opened the curtain to nothingness. "You'll find yourself quite a ways from where you started," he said, "because you did a little moving around here. Go ahead."

"Thanks," said Harry.

Gurrah laughed. "Don't thank me, chum. You rate all the thanks! Hey—if, after you kick off, you don't make out so good up there, let them toss you over to me. You'll be treated good; you've my word on it. Beat it; luck!"

Holding his breath, Harry Wright stepped through the doorway.

He had to walk thirty blocks to the garage, and when he got there the boss was waiting for him.

"Where you been, Wright?"

"I—lost my way."

"Don't get wise. What do you think this is—vacation time? Get going on the spring job. It won't be finished now till tomorrow, I suppose."

Harry looked him straight in the eye and said, "Listen. It'll be finished tonight. I happen to know." And, still grinning, he went back into the garage and took out his tools.

THE END.

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LURANI

BY PAUL DENNIS LAVOND

She is not as mortal women, strange Lurani of the Sea,
As the desert she is alien; as the night wind she is free;
And her flesh is lightly tinted with the sheen of waters still,
With the green of placid waters, and her touch is damp and chill.

As the lily of the swamplands, as the stately lily lolling,
She is tall and finely fashioned, and her dark hair, gently falling,
Is alive: it creeps and quivers over shoulder, thigh, and breast—
Slowly creeps and curls, caressing the soft contours of her breast.

In the eyes of my Lurani, in her deep eyes, gently gleaming,
I can see strange thoughts, exotic, and desires that set me dreaming
Of the mighty Sea triumphant, as she strokes me with her hand,
As she languorously strokes me with her curious webbed hand.

I have lain beside Lurani in her pythonlike embrace
Through the nights that were immortal, and the evil in her face
Evermore shall keep me ardent, while her dark eyes o'er me gloat,
Till the night I feel her tresses tighten around my throat.

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TROUBLE WITH WATER

BY H. L. GOLD

Beer for breakfast — when the Little Folk are peeved!

Greenberg did not deserve his surroundings. He was the first fisherman of the season, which guaranteed him a fine catch; he sat in a dry boat—one without a single leak—far out on a lake that was ruffled only enough to agitate his artificial fly. The sun was warm, the air was cool; he sat comfortably on a cushion; he had brought a hearty lunch; and two bottles of beer hung over the stern in the cold water.

Any other man would have been soaked with joy to be fishing on such a splendid day. Normally, Greenberg himself would have been ecstatic, but instead of relaxing and waiting for a nibble, he was plagued by worries.

This short, slightly gross, definitely bald, eminently respectable businessman lived a gypsy life. During the summer he lived in a hotel with kitchen privileges in Rockaway; winters he lived in a hotel with kitchen privileges in Florida; and in both places he operated concessions. For years now, rain had fallen on schedule every week end, and there had been storms and floods on Decoration Day, July 4th and Labor Day. He did not love his life, but it was a way of making a living.

He closed his eyes and groaned. If he had only had a son instead of his Rosie! Then things would have been mighty different—

For one thing, a son could run the hot dog and hamburger griddle, Esther could draw beer, and he would make soft drinks. There would be small difference in the profits, Greenberg admitted to himself; but at least those profits could be put aside for old age, instead of toward a dowry for his miserably ugly, dumpy, pitifully eager Rosie.

"All right—so what do I care if she don't get married?" he had cried to his wife a thousand times. "I'll support her. Other men can set up boys in candy stores with soda fountains that have only two spigots. Why should I have to give a boy a regular International Casino?"

"May your tongue rot in your head, you no-good piker!" she would scream. "It ain't right for a girl to be an old maid. If we have to die in the poorhouse, I'll get my poor Rosie a husband. Every penny we don't need for living goes to her dowry!"

Greenberg did not hate his daughter, nor did he blame her for his misfortunes; yet, because of her, he was fishing with a broken rod that he had to tape together.

That morning his wife opened her eyes and saw him packing his equipment. She instantly came awake. "Go ahead!" she shrilled—speaking in a conversational tone was not one of her accomplishments—"Go fishing, you loafer! Leave me here alone. I can connect the beer pipes and the gas for soda water. I can buy ice cream, frankfurters, rolls, sirup, and watch the gas and electric men at the same time. Go ahead—go fishing!"

"I ordered everything," he mumbled soothingly. "The gas and electric won't be turned on today. I only wanted to go fishing—it's my last chance. Tomorrow we open the concession. Tell the truth, Esther, can I go fishing after we open?"

"I don't care about that. Am I your wife or ain't I, that you should go ordering everything without asking me—"

He defended his actions. It was a tactical mistake. While she was still in bed, he should have picked up his equipment and left. By the time the argument got around to Rosie's dowry, she stood facing him.

"For myself I don't care," she yelled. "What kind of a monster are you that you can go fishing while your daughter eats her heart out? And on a day like this yet! You should only have to make supper and dress Rosie up. A lot you care that a nice boy is coming to supper tonight and maybe take Rosie out, you no-good father, you!"

From that point it was only one hot protest and a shrill curse to find himself clutching half a broken rod, with the other half being flung at his head.

Now he sat in his beautifully dry boat on an excellent game lake far out on Long Island, desperately aware that any average fish might collapse his taped rod.

What else could he expect? He had missed his train; he had had to wait for the boathouse proprietor; his favorite dry fly was missing; and, since morning, not a fish struck at the bait. Not a single fish!

And it was getting late. He had no more patience. He ripped the cap off a bottle of beer and drank it, in order to gain courage to change his fly for a less sporting bloodworm. It hurt him, but he wanted a fish.

The hook and the squirming worm sank. Before it came to rest, he felt a nibble. He sucked in his breath exultantly and snapped the hook deep into the fish's mouth. Sometimes, he thought philosophically, they just won't take artificial bait. He reeled in slowly.

"Oh, Lord," he prayed, "a dollar for charity—just don't let the rod bend in half where I taped it!"

It was sagging dangerously. He looked at it unhappily and raised his ante to five dollars; even at that price it looked impossible. He dipped his rod into the water, parallel with the line, to remove the strain. He was glad no one could see him do it. The line reeled in without a fight.

"Have I—God forbid!—got an eel or something not kosher?" he mumbled.

He did not really care what it was—even an eel—anything at all.

He pulled in a long, pointed, brimless green hat.

For a moment he glared at it. His mouth hardened. Then, viciously, he yanked the hat off the hook, threw it on the floor and trampled on it. He rubbed his hands together in anguish.

"All day I fish," he wailed, "two dollars for train fare, a dollar for a boat, a quarter for bait, a new rod I got to buy—and a five-dollar-mortgage charity has got on me. For what? For you, you hat, you!"

Out in the water an extremely civil voice asked politely: "May I have my hat, please?"

Greenberg glowered up. He saw a little man come swimming vigorously through the water toward him: small arms crossed with enormous dignity, vast ears on a pointed face propelling him quite rapidly and efficiently. With serious determination he drove through the water, and, at the starboard rail, his amazing ears kept him stationary while he looked gravely at Greenberg.

"You are stamping on my hat," he pointed out without anger.

To Greenberg this was highly unimportant. "With the ears you're swimming," he grinned in a superior way. "Do you look funny!"

"How else could I swim?" the little man asked politely.

"With the arms and legs, like a regular human being, of course."

"But I am not a human being. I am a water gnome, a relative of the more common mining gnome. I cannot swim with my arms, because they must be crossed to give an appearance of dignity suitable to a water gnome; and my feet are used for writing and holding things. On the other hand, my ears are perfectly adapted for propulsion in water. Consequently, I employ them for that purpose. But please, my hat—there are several matters requiring my immediate attention, and I must not waste time."

Greenberg's unpleasant attitude toward the remarkably civil gnome is easily understandable. He had found someone he could feel superior to, and, by insulting him, his depressed ego could expand. The water gnome certainly looked inoffensive enough, being only two feet tall.

"What you got that's so important to do, Big Ears?" he asked nastily.

Greenberg hoped the gnome would be offended. He was not, since his ears, to him, were perfectly normal, just as you would not be insulted if a member of a race of atrophied beings were to call you "Big Muscles." You might even feel flattered.

"I really must hurry," the gnome said, almost anxiously. "But if I have to answer your questions in order to get back my hat—we are engaged in restocking the Eastern waters with fish. Last year there was quite a drain. The bureau of fisheries is co-operating with us to some extent, but, of course, we cannot depend too much on them. Until the population rises to normal, every fish has instructions not to nibble."

Greenberg allowed himself a smile, an annoying skeptical smile.

"My main work," the gnome went on resignedly, "is control of the rainfall over the Eastern seaboard. Our fact-finding committee, which is scientifically situated in the meteorological center of the continent, co-ordinates the rainfall needs of the entire continent; and when they determine the amount of rain needed in particular spots of the East, I make it rain to that extent. Now may I have my hat, please?"

Greenberg laughed coarsely. "The first lie was big enough—about telling the fish not to bite. You make it rain like I'm President of the United States!" He bent toward the gnome slyly. "How's about proof?"

"Certainly, if you insist." The gnome raised his patient, triangular face toward a particularly clear blue spot in the sky, a trifle to one side of Greenberg. "Watch that bit of the sky."

Greenberg looked up humorously. Even when a small dark cloud rapidly formed in the previously clear spot, his grin remained broad. It could have been coincidental. But then large drops of undeniable rain fell over a twenty-foot circle; and Greenberg's mocking grin shrank and grew sour.

He glared hatred at the gnome, finally convinced. "So you're the dirty crook who makes it rain on week ends!"

"Usually on week ends during the summer," the gnome admitted. "Ninety-two per cent of water consumption is on weekdays. Obviously we must replace that water. The week ends, of course, are the logical time."

"But, you thief!" Greenberg cried hysterically, "you murderer! What do you care what you do to my concession with your rain? It ain't bad enough business would be rotten even without rain, you got to make floods!"

"I'm sorry," the gnome replied, untouched by Greenberg's rhetoric. "We do not create rainfall for the benefit of men. We are here to protect the fish.

"Now please give me my hat. I have wasted enough time, when I should be preparing the extremely heavy rain needed for this coming week end."

Greenberg jumped to his feet in the unsteady boat. "Rain this week end—when I can maybe make a profit for a change! A lot you care if you ruin business. May you and your fish die a horrible, lingering death."

And he furiously ripped the green hat to pieces and hurled them at the gnome.

"I'm really sorry you did that," the little fellow said calmly, his huge ears treading water without the slightest increase of pace to indicate his anger. "We Little Folks have no tempers to lose. Nevertheless, occasionally we find it necessary to discipline certain of your people, in order to retain our dignity. I am not malignant; but, since you hate water and those who live in it, water and those who live in it will keep away from you."

With his arms still folded in great dignity, the tiny water gnome flipped his vast ears and disappeared in a neat surface dive.

Greenberg glowered at the spreading circles of waves. He did not grasp the gnome's final restraining order; he did not even attempt to interpret it. Instead he glared angrily out of the corner of his eye at the phenomenal circle of rain that fell from a perfectly clear sky. The gnome must have remembered it at length, for a moment later the rain stopped. Like shutting off a faucet, Greenberg unwillingly thought.

"Good-by, week-end business," he growled. "If Esther finds out I got into an argument with the guy who makes it rain—"

He made an underhand cast, hoping for just one fish. The line flew out over the water; then the hook arched upward and came to rest several inches above the surface, hanging quite steadily and without support in the air.

"Well, go down in the water!" Greenberg said viciously, and he swished his rod back and forth to pull the hook down from its ridiculous levitation. It refused.

Muttering something incoherent about being hanged before he'd give in, Greenberg hurled his useless rod at the water. By this time he was not surprised when it hovered in the air above the lake. He merely glanced red-eyed at it, tossed out the remains of the gnome's hat, and snatched up the oars.

When he pulled back on them to row to land, they did not touch the water—naturally. Instead they flashed unimpeded through the air, and Greenberg tumbled into the bow.

"A-ha!" he grated. "Here's where the trouble begins." He bent over the side. As he had suspected, the keel floated a remarkable distance above the lake.

By rowing against the air, he moved with maddening slowness toward shore, like a medieval conception of a flying machine. His main concern was that no one should see him in his humiliating position.

At the hotel he tried to sneak past the kitchen to the bathroom. He knew that Esther waited to curse him for fishing the day before opening, but more especially on the very day that a nice boy was coming to see her Rosie. If he could dress in a hurry, she might have less to say—

"Oh, there you are, you good-for-nothing!"

He froze to a halt.

"Look at you!" she screamed shrilly. "Filthy—you stink from fish!"

"I didn't catch anything, darling," he protested timidly.

"You stink anyhow. Go take a bath, may you drown in it! Get dressed in two minutes or less, and entertain the boy when he gets here. Hurry!"

He locked himself in, happy to escape her voice, started the water in the tub, and stripped from the waist up. A hot bath, he hoped, would rid him of his depressed feeling.

First, no fish; now, rain on week ends! What would Esther say—if she knew, of course. And, of course, he would not tell her.

"Let myself in for a lifetime of curses!" he sneered. "Ha!"

He clamped a new blade into his razor, opened the

tube of shaving cream, and stared objectively at the mirror. The dominant feature of the soft, chubby face that stared back was its ugly black stubble; but he set his stubborn chin and glowered. He really looked quite fierce and indomitable. Unfortunately, Esther never saw his face in that uncharacteristic pose, otherwise she would speak more softly.

"Herman Greenberg never gives in!" he whispered between savagely hardened lips. "Rain on week ends, no fish—anything he wants; a lot I care! Believe me, he'll come crawling to me before I go to him."

He gradually became aware that his shaving brush was not getting wet. When he looked down and saw the water dividing into streams that flowed around it, his determined face slipped and grew desperately anxious. He tried to trap the water—by catching it in his cupped hands, by creeping up on it from behind, as if it were some shy animal, and shoving his brush at it—but it broke and ran away from his touch. Then he jammed his palm against the faucet. Defeated, he heard it gurgle back down the pipe, probably as far as the main.

"What do I do now?" he groaned. "Will Esther give it to me if I don't take a shave! But how? I can't shave without water."

Glumly, he shut off the bath, undressed and stepped into the tub. He lay down to soak. It took a moment of horrified stupor to realize that he was completely dry and that he lay in a waterless bathtub. The water, in one surge of revulsion, had swept out onto the floor.

"Herman, stop splashing!" his wife yelled. "I just washed that floor. If I find one little puddle I'll murder you!"

Greenberg surveyed the instep-deep pool over the bathroom floor. "Yes, my love," he croaked unhappily.

With an inadequate washrag he chased the elusive water, hoping to mop it all up before it would seep through to the apartment below. His washrag remained dry, however, and he knew that the ceiling underneath was dripping. The water was still on the floor.

In despair, he sat on the edge of the bathtub. For some time he sat in silence. Then his wife banged on the door, urging him to come out. He started and dressed moodily.

When he sneaked out and shut the bathroom door tightly on the flood inside, he was extremely dirty and his face was raw where he had experimentally attempted to shave with a dry razor.

"Rosie!" he called in a hoarse whisper. "*Sh!* Where's mamma?"

His daughter sat on the studio couch and applied nail polish to her stubby fingers. "You look terrible," she said in a conversational tone. "Aren't you going to shave?"

He recoiled at the sound of her voice, which, to him, roared out like a siren. "Quiet, Rosie! *Sh!*" And for further emphasis, he shoved his lips out against a warning finger. He heard his wife striding heavily around the kitchen. "Rosie," he cooed, "I'll give you a dollar if you'll mop up the water I spilled in the bathroom."

"I can't papa," she stated firmly. "I'm all dressed."

"Two dollars, Rosie—all right, two and a half, you blackmailer."

He flinched when he heard her gasp in the bathroom; but, when she came out with soaked shoes, he fled downstairs. He wandered aimlessly toward the village.

Now he was in for it, he thought; screams from Esther, tears from Rosie—plus a new pair of shoes for Rosie and two and a half dollars. It would be worse, though, if he could not get rid of his whiskers—

Rubbing the tender spots where his dry razor had raked his face, he mused blankly at a drugstore window. He saw nothing to help him, but he went inside anyhow and stood hopefully at the drug counter. A face peered at him through a space scratched in the wall case mirror, and the druggist came out. A nice-looking, intelligent fellow, Greenberg saw at a glance.

"What you got for shaving that I can use without water?" he asked.

"Skin irritation, eh?" the pharmacist replied. "I got something very good for that."

"No. It's just— Well, I don't like to shave with water."

The druggist seemed disappointed. "Well, I got brushless shaving cream." Then he brightened. "But I got an electric razor—much better."

"How much?" Greenberg asked cautiously.

"Only fifteen dollars, and it lasts a lifetime."

"Give me the shaving cream," Greenberg said coldly.

With the tactical science of a military expert, he walked around until some time after dark. Only then did he go back to the hotel, to wait outside. It was after seven, he was getting hungry, and the people who entered the hotel he knew as permanent summer guests. At last a stranger passed him and ran up the stairs.

Greenberg hesitated for a moment. The stranger was scarcely a boy, as Esther had definitely termed him, but Greenberg reasoned that her term was merely wish-fulfillment, and he jauntily ran up behind him.

He allowed a few minutes to pass, for the man to introduce himself and let Esther and Rosie don their company manners. Then, secure in the knowledge that there would be no scene until the guest left, he entered.

He waded through a hostile atmosphere, urbanely shook hands with Sammie Katz, who was a doctor—probably, Greenberg thought shrewdly, in search of an office—and excused himself.

In the bathroom he carefully read the direction for using brushless shaving cream. He felt less confident when he realized that he had to wash his face thoroughly with soap and water, but without benefit of either, he spread the cream on, patted it, and waited for his beard to soften. It did not, as he discovered while shaving. He wiped his face dry. The towel was sticky and black, with whiskers suspended in paste, and, for that, he knew, there would be yelling. He shrugged resignedly. He would have to spend fifteen dollars for an electric razor

after all; this foolishness was costing him a fortune!

That they were waiting for him before beginning supper, was, he knew, only a gesture for the sake of company. Without changing her hard, brilliant smile, Esther whispered: "Wait! I'll get you later—"

He smiled back, his tortured, slashed face creasing painfully. All that could be changed by his being enormously pleasant to Rosie's young man. If he could slip Sammie a few dollars—more expense, he groaned—to take Rosie out, Esther would forgive everything.

He was too engaged in beaming and putting Sammie at ease to think of what would happen after he ate caviar canapes. Under other circumstances Greenberg would have been repulsed by Sammie's ultra-professional waxed mustache—an offensively small, pointed thing—and his commercial attitude toward poor Rosie; but Greenberg regarded him as a potential savior.

"You open an office yet, Dr. Katz?"

"Not yet. You know how things are. Anyhow, call me Sammie."

Greenberg recognized the gambit with satisfaction, since it seemed to please Esther so much. At one stroke Sammie had ingratiated himself and begun bargaining negotiations.

Without another word, Greenberg lifted his spoon to attack the soup. It would be easy to snare this eager doctor. A *doctor!* No wonder Esther and Rosie were so puffed with joy.

In the proper company way, he pushed his spoon away from him. The soup spilled onto the tablecloth.

"Not so hard, you dope," Esther hissed.

He drew the spoon toward him. The soup leaped off it like a live thing and splashed over him—turning, just before contact, to fall on the floor. He gulped and pushed the bowl away. This time the soup poured over the side of the plate and lay in a huge puddle on the table.

"I didn't want any soup anyhow," he said in a horrible attempt at levity. Lucky for him, he thought wildly, that Sammie was there to pacify Esther with his smooth college talk—not a bad fellow, Sammie, in spite of his mustache; he'd come in handy at times.

Greenberg lapsed into a paralysis of fear. He was thirsty after having eaten the caviar, which beats herring any time as a thirst raiser. But the knowledge that he could not touch water without having it recoil and perhaps spill, made his thirst a monumental craving. He attacked the problem cunningly.

The others were talking rapidly and rather hysterically. He waited until his courage was equal to his thirst; then he leaned over the table with a glass in his hand. "Sammie, do you mind—a little water, huh?"

Sammie poured from a pitcher while Esther watched for more of his tricks. It was to be expected, but still he was shocked when the water exploded out of the glass directly at Sammie's only suit.

"If you'll excuse me," Sammie said angrily, "I don't like to eat with lunatics."

And he left, though Esther cried and begged him to stay. Rosie was too stunned to move. But when the door closed, Greenberg raised his agonized eyes to watch his wife stalk murderously toward him.

Greenberg stood on the boardwalk outside his concession and glared blearily at the peaceful, blue, highly unpleasant ocean. He wondered what would happen if he started at the edge of the water and strode out. He could probably walk right to Europe on dry land.

It was early—much too early for business—and he was tired. Neither he nor Esther had slept; and it was practically certain that the neighbors hadn't either. But above all he was incredibly thirsty.

In a spirit of experimentation, he mixed a soda. Of course its high water content made it slop onto the floor. For breakfast he had surreptitiously tried fruit juice and coffee, without success.

With his tongue dry to the point of furriness, he sat weakly on a boardwalk bench in front of his concession. It was Friday morning, which meant that the day was clear, with a promise of intense heat. Had it been Saturday, it naturally would have been raining.

"This year," he moaned, "I'll be wiped out. If I can't mix sodas, why should beer stay in a glass for me? I thought I could hire a boy for ten dollars a week to run the hot-dog griddle; I could make sodas, and Esther could draw beer. All I can do is make hot dogs, Esther can still draw beer; but twenty or maybe twenty-five a week I got to pay a sodaman. I won't even come out square—a fortune I'll lose!"

The situation really was desperate. Concessions depend on too many factors to be anything but capriciously profitable.

His throat was fiery and his soft brown eyes held a fierce glaze when the gas and electric were turned on, the beer pipes connected, the tank of carbon dioxide hitched to the pump, and the refrigerator started.

Gradually, the beach was filling with bathers. Greenberg writhed on his bench and envied them. They could swim and drink without having liquids draw away from them as if in horror. They were not thirsty—

And then he saw his first customers approach. His business experience was that morning customers buy only soft drinks. In a mad haste he put up the shutters and fled to the hotel.

"Esther!" he cried. "I got to tell you! I can't stand it—"

Threateningly, his wife held her broom like a baseball bat. "Go back to the concession, you crazy fool. Ain't you done enough already?"

He could not be hurt more than he had been. For once he did not cringe. "You got to help me, Esther."

"Why didn't you shave, you no-good bum? Is that any way—"

"That's what I got to tell you. Yesterday I got into an argument with a water gnome—"

"A what?" Esther looked at him suspiciously.

"A water gnome," he babbled in a rush of words. "A little man so high, with big ears that he swims with, and he makes it rain—"

"Herman!" she screamed. "Stop that nonsense. You're crazy!"

Greenberg pounded his forehead with his fist. "I *ain't* crazy. Look, Esther. Come with me into the kitchen."

She followed him readily enough, but her attitude made him feel more helpless and alone than ever. With her fists on her plump hips and her feet set wide, she cautiously watched him try to fill a glass of water.

"Don't you see?" he wailed. "It won't go in the glass. It spills all over. It runs away from me."

She was puzzled. "What happened to you?"

Brokenly, Greenberg told of his encounter with the water gnome, leaving out no single degrading detail. "And now I can't touch water," he ended. "I can't drink it. I can't make sodas. On top of it all, I got such a thirst, it's killing me."

Esther's reaction was instantaneous. She threw her arms around him, drew his head down to her shoulder, and patted him comfortingly as if he were a child. "Herman, my poor Herman!" she breathed tenderly. "What did we ever do to deserve such a curse?"

"What shall I do, Esther?" he cried helplessly.

She held him at arm's length. "You got to go to a doctor," she said firmly. "How long can you go without drinking? Without water you'll die. Maybe sometimes I am a little hard on you, but you know I love you—"

"I know, mamma," he sighed. "But how can a doctor help me?"

"Am I a doctor that I should know? Go anyhow. What can you lose?"

He hesitated. "I need fifteen dollars for an electric razor," he said in a low, weak voice.

"So?" she replied. "If you got to, you got to. Go, darling. I'll take care of the concession."

Greenberg no longer felt deserted and alone. He walked almost confidently to a doctor's office. Manfully, he explained his symptoms. The doctor listened with professional sympathy, until Greenberg reached his description of the water gnome.

Then his eyes glittered and narrowed. "I know just the thing for you, Mr. Greenberg," he interrupted. "Sit there until I come back."

Greenberg sat quietly. He even permitted himself a surge of hope. But it seemed only a moment later that he was vaguely conscious of a siren screaming toward him; and then he was overwhelmed by the doctor and two internes who pounced on him and tried to squeeze him into a bag.

He resisted, of course. He was terrified enough to punch wildly. "What are you doing to me?" he shrieked. "Don't put that thing on me!"

"Easy now," the doctor soothed. "Everything will be all right."

It was on that humiliating scene that the policeman, required by law to accompany public ambulances, appeared. "What's up?" he asked.

"Don't stand there, you fathead," an intern shouted. "This man's crazy. Help us get him into this strait jacket."

But the policeman approached indecisively. "Take it easy, Mr. Greenberg. They ain't gonna hurt you while I'm here. What's it all about?"

"Mike!" Greenberg cried, and clung to his protector's sleeve. "They think I'm crazy—"

"Of course he's crazy," the doctor stated. "He came in here with a fantastic yarn about a water gnome putting a curse on him."

"What kind of a curse, Mr. Greenberg?" Mike asked cautiously.

"I got into an argument with the water gnome who makes it rain and takes care of the fish," Greenberg blurted. "I tore up his hat. Now he won't let water touch me. I can't drink, or anything—"

The doctor nodded. "There you are. Absolutely insane."

"Shut up." For a long moment Mike stared curiously at Greenberg. Then: "Did any of you scientists think of testing him? Here, Mr. Greenberg." He poured water into a paper cup and held it out.

Greenberg moved to take it. The water backed up against the cup's far lip; when he took it in his hand, the water shot out into the air.

"Crazy, is he?" Mike asked with heavy irony. "I guess you don't know there's things like gnomes and elves. Come with me, Mr. Greenberg."

They went out together and walked toward the boardwalk. Greenberg told Mike the entire story and explained how, besides being so uncomfortable to him personally, it would ruin him financially.

"Well, doctors can't help you," Mike said at length. "What do they know about the Little Folk? And I can't say I blame you for sassing the gnome. You ain't Irish or you'd have spoke with more respect to him. Anyhow, you're thirsty. Can't you drink anything?"

"Not a thing," Greenberg said mournfully.

They entered the concession. A single glance told Greenberg that business was very quiet, but even that could not lower his feelings more than they already were. Esther clutched him as soon as she saw them.

"Well?" she asked anxiously.

Greenberg shrugged in despair. "Nothing. He thought I was crazy."

Mike stared at the bar. Memory seemed to struggle behind his reflective eyes. "Sure," he said after a long pause. "Did you try beer, Mr. Greenberg? When I was a boy my old mother told me all about elves and gnomes and the rest of the Little Folk. She knew them, all right. They don't touch alcohol, you know. Try drawing a glass of beer—"

Greenberg trudged obediently behind the bar and held a glass under the spigot. Suddenly his despondent face brightened. Beer creamed into the glass—and stayed there! Mike and Esther grinned at each other as Greenberg threw back his head and furiously drank.

"Mike!" he crowed. "I'm saved. You got to drink with me!"

"Well—" Mike protested feebly.

By late afternoon, Esther had to close the concession and take her husband and Mike to the hotel.

The following day, being Saturday, brought a flood of rain. Greenberg nursed an imposing hang-over that was constantly aggravated by his having to drink beer in order to satisfy his recurring thirst. He thought of forbidden icebags and alkaline drinks in an agony of longing.

"I can't stand it!" he groaned. "Beer for breakfast—phooey!"

"It's better than nothing," Esther said fatalistically.

"So help me, I don't know if it is. But, darling, you ain't mad at me on account of Sammie, are you?"

She smiled gently, "Poo! Talk dowry and he'll come back quick."

"That's what I thought. But what am I going to do about my curse?"

Cheerfully, Mike furled an umbrella and strode in with a little old woman, whom he introduced as his mother. Greenberg enviously saw evidence of the effectiveness of icebags and alkaline drinks, for Mike had been just as high as he the day before.

"Mike has told me about you and the gnome," the old lady said. "Now I know the Little Folk well, and I don't hold you to blame for insulting him, seeing you never met a gnome before. But I suppose you want to get rid of your curse. Are you repentant?"

Greenberg shuddered. "Beer for breakfast! Can you ask?"

"Well, just you go to this lake and give the gnome proof."

"What kind of proof?" Greenberg asked eagerly.

"Bring him sugar. The Little Folk love the stuff—"

Greenberg beamed. "Did you hear that, Esther? I'll get a barrel—"

"They love sugar, but they can't eat it," the old lady broke in. "It melts in water. You got to figure out a way so it won't. Then the little gentleman'll know you're repentant for real."

"A-ah!" Greenberg cried. "I knew there was a catch!"

There was a sympathetic silence while his agitated mind attacked the problem from all angles. Then the old lady said in awe: "The minute I saw your place I knew Mike had told the truth. I never seen a sight like it in my life—rain coming down, like the flood, everywhere else; but all around this place, in a big circle, it's dry as a bone!"

While Greenberg scarcely heard her, Mike nodded and Esther seemed peculiarly interested in the phenomenon. When he admitted defeat and came out of his reflected stupor, he was alone in the concession, with only a vague memory of Esther's saying she would not be back for several hours.

"What am I going to do?" he muttered. "Sugar that won't melt—" He drew a glass of beer and drank it thoughtfully. "Particular they got to be yet. Ain't it good enough if I bring simple sirup—that's sweet."

He pottered about the place, looking for something to do. He could not polish the fountain or the bar, and the few frankfurters broiling on the griddle probably would go to waste. The floor had already been swept. So he sat uneasily and worried his problem.

"Monday, no matter what," he resolved, "I'll go to the lake. It don't pay to go tomorrow. I'll only catch a cold because it'll rain."

At last Esther returned, smiling in a strange way. She was extremely gentle, tender and thoughtful; and for that he was appreciative. But that night and all day Sunday he understood the reason for her happiness.

She had spread word that, while it rained in every other place all over town, their concession was miraculously dry. So, besides a headache that made his body throb in rhythm to its vast pulse, Greenberg had to work like six men satisfying the crowd who mobbed the place to see the miracle and enjoy the dry warmth.

How much they took in will never be known. Greenberg made it a practice not to discuss such personal matters. But it is quite definite that not even in 1929 had he done so well over a single week end.

Very early Monday morning he was dressing quietly, not to disturb his wife. Esther, however, raised herself on her elbow and looked at him doubtfully.

"Herman," she called softly, "do you really have to go?"

He turned, puzzled. "What do you mean—do I have to go?"

"Well—" She hesitated. Then: "Couldn't you wait until the end of the season, Herman, darling?"

He staggered back a step, his face working in horror. "What kind of an idea is that for my own wife to have?" he croaked. "Beer I have to drink instead of water. How can I stand it? Do you think I *like* beer? I can't wash myself. Already people don't like to stand near me; and how will they act at the end of the season? I go around looking like a bum because my beard is too tough for an electric razor, and I'm all the time drunk—the first Greenberg to be a drunkard. I want to be respected—"

"I know, Herman, darling," she sighed. "But I thought for the sake of Rosie— Such a business we've never done like we did this week end. If it rains every Saturday and Sunday, but not on our concession, we'll make a *fortune!*"

"Esther!" Herman cried, shocked. "Doesn't my health mean anything?"

"Of course, darling. Only I thought maybe you could stand it for—"

He snatched his hat, tie and jacket, and slammed the door. Outside, though, he stood indeterminedly. He could hear his wife crying, and he realized that, if he succeeded in getting the gnome to remove the curse, he would forfeit an opportunity to make a great deal of money.

He finished dressing more slowly. Esther was right, to a certain extent. If he could tolerate his waterless condition—

"No!" he gritted decisively. "Already my friends

avoid me. It isn't right that a respectable man like me should always be drunk and not take a bath. So we'll make less money. Money isn't everything—"

And with great determination he went to the lake.

But that evening, before going home, Mike walked out of his way to stop in at the concession. He found Greenberg sitting on a chair, his head in his hands, and his body rocking slowly in anguish.

"What is it, Mr. Greenberg?" he asked gently.

Greenberg looked up. His eyes were dazed. "Oh, you, Mike," he said blankly. Then his gaze cleared, grew more intelligent, and he stood up and led Mike to the bar. Silently, they drank beer. "I went to the lake today," he said hollowly. "I walked all around it, hollering like mad. The gnome didn't stick his head out of the water once."

"I know." Mike nodded sadly. "They're busy all the time."

Greenberg spread his hands imploringly. "So what can I do? I can't write him a letter or send him a telegram; he ain't got a door to knock on or a bell for me to ring. How do I get him to come up and talk?"

His shoulders sagged. "Here, Mike. Have a cigar. You been a real good friend, but I guess we're licked."

They stood in an awkward silence. Finally Mike blurted: "Real hot, today. A regular scorcher."

"Yeah. Esther says business was pretty good, if it keeps up."

Mike fumbled at the Cellophane wrapper. Greenberg said: "Anyhow, suppose I did talk to the gnome. What about the sugar?"

The silence dragged itself out, became tense and uncomfortable. Mike was distinctly embarrassed. His brusque nature was not adapted for comforting discouraged friends. With immense concentration he rolled the cigar between his fingers and listened for a rustle.

"Day like this's hell on cigars," he mumbled, for the sake of conversation. "Dries them like nobody's business. This one ain't, though."

"Yeah," Greenberg said abstractedly. "Cellophane keeps them—"

They looked suddenly at each other, their faces clean of expression.

"Holy smoke!" Mike yelled.

"Cellophane on sugar!" Greenberg choked out.

"Yeah," Mike whispered in awe. "I'll switch my day off with Joe, and I'll go to the lake with you tomorrow. I'll call for you early."

Greenberg pressed his hand, too strangled by emotion for speech. When Esther came to relieve him, he left her at the concession with only the inexperienced griddle boy to assist her, while he searched the village for cubes of sugar wrapped in Cellophane.

The sun had scarcely risen when Mike reached the hotel, but Greenberg had long been dressed and stood on the porch waiting impatiently. Mike was genuinely anxious for his friend. Greenberg staggered along toward the station, his eyes almost crossed with the pain of a terrific hang-over.

They stopped at a cafeteria for breakfast. Mike ordered orange juice, bacon and eggs, and coffee half-and-half. When he heard the order, Greenberg had to gag down a lump in his throat.

"What'll you have?" the counterman asked.

Greenberg flushed. "Beer," he said hoarsely.

"You kidding me?" Greenberg shook his head, unable to speak. "Want anything with it? Cereal, pie, toast—"

"Just beer." And he forced himself to swallow it. "So help me," he hissed at Mike, "another beer for breakfast will kill me!"

"I know how it is," Mike said around a mouthful of food.

On the train they attempted to make plans. But they were faced by a phenomenon that neither had encountered before, and so they got nowhere. They walked glumly to the lake, fully aware that they would have to employ the empirical method of discarding tactics that did not work.

"How about a boat?" Mike suggested.

"It won't stay in the water with me in it. And you can't row it."

"Well, what'll we do then?"

Greenberg bit his lip and stared at the beautiful blue lake. There the gnome lived, so near to them. "Go through the woods along the shore—and holler. I'll go the opposite way. We'll pass each other and meet at the boathouse. If the gnome comes up, yell for me."

"O. K.," Mike said, not very confidently.

The lake was quite large and they walked slowly around it, pausing often to get the proper stance for particularly emphatic shouts. But two hours later, when they stood opposite each other with the full diameter of the lake between them, Greenberg heard Mike's hoarse voice: "Hey, gnome!"

"Hey, gnome!" Greenberg yelled. "Come on up!"

An hour later they crossed paths. They were tired, discouraged, and their throats burned; and only fishermen disturbed the lake's surface.

"This ain't doing any good," Mike said. "Let's go back to the boathouse."

"What'll we do?" Greenberg rasped. "I can't give up!"

They trudged back around the lake, shouting half-heartedly. At the boathouse, Greenberg had to admit that he was beaten. The boathouse owner marched threateningly toward them.

"Why don't you maniacs get away from here?" he barked. "What's the idea of hollering and scaring away the fish? The guys are sore—"

"We're not going to holler any more," Greenberg said. "It's no use."

When they bought beer and Mike, on an impulse, hired a boat, the owner cooled off with amazing rapidity and went off to unpack bait.

"What did you get a boat for?" Greenberg asked. can't ride in it."

"You're not going to. You're gonna walk."

"Around the lake again?" Greenberg cried.

"Nope. Look, Mr. Greenberg. Maybe the gnome can't hear us through all that water. Gnomes ain't hard-hearted. If he heard us and thought you were sorry, he'd take his curse off you in a jiffy."

"Maybe." Greenberg was not convinced. "So where do I come in?"

"The way I figure it, some way or other you push water away, but the water pushes you away just as hard. Anyhow, I hope so. If it does, you can walk on the lake." As he spoke, Mike had been lifting large stones and dumping them on the bottom of the boat. "Give me a hand with these."

Any activity, however useless, was better than none, Greenberg felt. He helped Mike fill the boat until just the gunwales were above water. Then Mike got in and shoved off.

"Come on," Mike said. "Try to walk on the water."

Greenberg hesitated. "Suppose I can't?"

"Nothing'll happen to you. You can't get wet, so you won't drown."

The logic of Mike's statement reassured Greenberg. He stepped out boldly. He experienced a peculiar sense of accomplishment when the water hastily retreated under his feet into pressure bowls, and an unseen, powerful force buoyed him upright across the lake's surface. Though his footing was not too secure, with care he was able to walk quite swiftly.

"Now what?" he asked, almost happily.

Mike had kept pace with him in the boat. He shipped his oars and passed Greenberg a rock. "We'll drop them all over the lake—make it noisy down there and upset the place. That'll get him up."

They were more hopeful now, and their comments, "Here's one that'll wake him," and "I'll hit him right on the noodle with this one," served to cheer them still further. And less than half the rocks had been dropped when Greenberg halted, a boulder in his hands. Something inside him wrapped itself tightly around his heart and his jaw dropped.

Mike followed his awed, joyful gaze. To himself, Mike had to admit that the gnome, propelling himself through the water with his ears, arms folded in tremendous dignity, was a funny sight.

"Must you drop rocks and disturb us at our work?" the gnome asked.

Greenberg gulped. "I'm sorry, Mr. Gnome," he said nervously. "I couldn't get you to come up by yelling."

The gnome looked at him. "Oh. You are the mortal who was disciplined. Why did you return?"

"To tell you that I'm sorry, and I won't insult you again."

"Have you proof of your sincerity?" the gnome asked quietly.

Greenberg fished furiously in his pocket and brought out a handful of sugar wrapped in Cellophane, which he tremblingly handed to the gnome.

"Ah, very clever, indeed," the little man said, unwrapping a cube and popping it eagerly into his mouth. "Long time since I've had some."

A moment later Greenberg spluttered and floundered under the surface. Even if Mike had not caught his jacket and helped him up, he could almost have enjoyed the sensation of being able to drown.

THE END

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BLACK CATS

BY CRISTEL HASTINGS

They slink down furtive alleyways,
  Shunning the corner lights,
Seeking the gloom of a somber yard
  Instead of the moonlit heights.

Only their eyes glow like phosphorous
  Steady, unblinking and sly,
Retreating with shadows that lost themselves
  As a milk cart rumbles by.

Sniffing at this and sneezing at that,
  Dainty, yet furtive and mean,
Matching their wits with the mongrel breed,
  Licking their long whiskers clean.

The black cats of midnight are phantoms
  Traveling on soft-cushioned feet,
Preferring dim alleys to arc lamps
  That brighten the well-traveled street.

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ANYTHING

BY PHILIP ST. JOHN

"Anything" he said would do for his name, and anything he said he'd do—and did! To the acute discomfort of the busybodies who don't do anything!

Until Anything came to Carlsburg, I thought I knew the town like the back of my hand. A small-town paper is built on knowledge of the people it serves, rather than news value, and I'd been editing the weekly *Union Leader*, unofficially known as the Onion, for eight years. But the rumors I heard of the Man in Brown refused to fit into the picture.

In common with most small farming communities where the population is falling instead of rising, gossip was the leading rival of the newspaper; and in Carlsburg, it had been raised to a high art. From Aunt Mabel's dizzy spells to Uncle Tod's rheumatism, everybody's business was common property, and a stranger should have been dissected and analyzed within three days.

The Man in Brown wasn't. There were rumors, of course, but they all boiled down to practically nothing. Apparently, he'd first been seen about a week before, looking for work, and vouchsafing no information about himself. For some reason, nobody had thought to ask him who he was or where he came from—which was the mystery of the affair.

Jim Thompson dropped into the *Union Leader's* office one morning, to talk about some advertising and to relay his wife's orders. Jim was the owner of the local lumber yard and hardware store, and one of the best advertisers I had, even if he did wear himself bald trying to save pennies.

"Now, Luke," he told me, "it's up to you to find out about this here Brown Man, and Molly don't want any nonsense. That's what you're supposed to be doing, running a newspaper like you are. Molly swears she'll drop her 'scription and get the Club to do the same, if you don't find out about him. He's been in town over a week now, ain't he?"

"Uh-huh." Molly ran the Carlsburg Culture Club, and I'd had trouble with her before. "I've been trying to get the facts, Jim, but the lack of information is stupendous. Anyhow, I heard yesterday that your wife has already met the fellow, which is more than I've been able to do. What'd she say about him?"

"He came to the door asking for work, seems like; said he didn't want no pay. Now I ask you, don't that sound half-cracked?" Thompson reached over for my tobacco and filled his pipe, fishing around for a match until I handed him one. "Molly give him the mower and told him to cut the lawn, which he did right smart and proper. Seems like she no more'n stepped back inside when the job was done. So she give him the bowl of bread and milk he wanted—that's all he'd take—and away he went."

It was the same story with minor variations, that I'd heard all week; he was continually searching for odd jobs, and taking his pay in bread and milk, or a place to sleep for the night. "But didn't she ask him where he was from and what he intended doing?"

"That's the funny part of it all. You know how Molly is?" Jim grinned, and I nodded. Even in Carlsburg, Molly's nose for scandal enjoyed a large reputation.

"Somehow, she never got around to asking him. They kinda talked about the weather and them begonias, but all the questions just slipped plumb out of Molly's mind. Matter of fact, she didn't even get his name."

Thompson took out his fountain pen and turned to the bench where I kept the ink, but stopped halfway. "Speak of the devil," he muttered, pointing across the street. "Here he comes now, headed right this way. Now see what you can make of him."

The man crossing the street was ordinary enough in appearance, a little over average height, with a weathered brown hat and wrinkled brown suit hanging loosely on him. His very lack of distinction made description impossible, except for the easy humor of the smile he was wearing. With a loose springy stride he came up the steps and leaned against the door facing me.

"Good morning, gentlemen. You're Luke Short, the editor here, I believe?" The voice was soft and casual. "I'd like to run an advertisement in the paper if you'll let me pay you in work. I haven't much use for money."

"Know anything about typesetting?" I asked. My regular one-man staff had been sick, and I needed a man to replace him in the worst way. "If you do, I'll run your item and pay regular wages."

He sauntered in. "Anything. I'm sort of an all-around worker, from baby-minding to house building. Only I don't work for money; just give me a place to stay and a couple of meals a day, and we'll call it square. That's what I wanted to say in the ad. You want the setting done now?"

"This afternoon." I pulled out a galley proof and held it out as a rough test; most people, I've found, don't know 6-point from great primer. "What size type is this?"

"Pica, or 12-point on the caption; the rest's brevier, or 8-point, upper and lower case. I told you I did anything—use a stick or linotype, run a job press, make cuts, write copy—anything. What'll I do this morning, and where'll I sleep?"

Jim Thompson had finally succeeded in filling his pen and was sticking a few blotters and envelopes in his pocket. He piped up. "You say you do building work?"

"Anything." The Man in Brown laid peculiar stress on the word whenever he used it.

"Well, I'm putting a new lumber shed up at the yard, and we're a mite shorthanded." The truth of the matter was that Jim had lost his workers because they asked more than he was willing to pay, and because his fat wife tried to run their private lives. "If you want work so bad, you can lay asbestos shingles, whenever Luke don't want you. Sure you don't want money? O.K., there's a cot in the back office where you can sleep. That O. K.?"

"Perfectly. And you'll find me a rapid worker, I'm sure."

They were almost out of range before I remembered enough to shout after him. "Hey, you! What'll I call you?"

He grinned back over his shoulder. "Anything," he answered, and it struck me as being appropriate, at that.

I had to cover the Volunteer Fire Department's proposed drive for money that noon, and it wasn't until I neared the office that I remembered Anything. I also remembered that the old second-hand linotype was out of order as usual, and needed a new cam installed before it could be used. Well, the paper had gone to bed late often enough before, so there was no use worrying.

Anything had his feet cocked up on the desk when I came in, and a pile of galley sheets lay beside him. "Setting's all done," he said. "Want me to make it up while you finish that story you've been out on?"

I looked at my watch and calculated the time needed to set the work I'd left for him. It didn't work out right, and a linotype refuses to be hurried, but there was no disputing the galley sheets; the work was done. "What about the linotype?"

"Oh, I fixed that. Had a little trouble finding whether you had a new cam, but my nose led me to it. By the way, your former helper called in to say the doctor says no more work for him. I stuck a 'faithful service' notice in the editorial column."

"I suppose you finished laying Thompson's shingles this morning, in your spare time?"

The sarcasm didn't register. "I finished about eleven-thirty—he only had eight thousand to lay. I spent my spare time over at the garage helping Sam White tear out and overhaul a tractor engine. How about that make-up?"

I gave up. "O. K., just as soon as I proofread these sheets."

"No need. They're all perfect now. I found a few broken face type when I ran off the proofs, and fixed that up." There was no hint of boasting, and his voice was casual; but I'd punched ETAOIN SHRDLU myself, so I had no faith in perfect typesetting. I went over the proofs carefully—and there were no errors!

We put the paper to bed ahead of schedule for the first time in a year, and I took Anything home with me to the bungalow I was renting on the edge of town. For the benefit of subscribers, he'd written a quarter column on himself that gave no information but would fool the readers into thinking they knew all about him. Anything was a master of vague phrasing.

"Look here, Anything," I opened up on him as he began cooking the supper, at his own insistence. "You might fool the others with that story you wrote, but just what is the truth? All you said was that you'd come from somewhere, done something, were somebody, and meant to stay here as long as you felt like it."

He grinned and began dishing out the meal. "At least is wasn't a lie, Luke. You like catsup with your meat?"

"I take meat straight. Better try some yourself."

"Bread and milk's all that agrees with my stomach. Let's say I'm on a diet. How long you been running the Onion?"

"About eight years. Um, that's good!" Anything was more chef than cook, and I appreciated a meal that wasn't thrown together. "I've been trying to get on the regular papers in Chicago or Minneapolis, but there's not

much hope. I'd have to quit here and take potluck in the city; they don't think much of small-town editors."

He finished his frugal meal and accepted a cigarette. "You're a pretty good man, Luke; maybe some paper'll take you on yet. In the meantime, you might do worse than the Onion. Thanks, I will take a piece of cheese, at that. You know, I think I'll like it here."

"Expect to stay long?"

"Maybe. It's sort of hard to say, the way things go. I had a pretty fair job on a farm upstate, but the farmer was Scotch."

I hoped for more information, but he gathered up the dishes and carried them out to the sink in silence, refusing my help. "Thanks, but I can do them faster alone. I suppose I can't blame people for suspecting me, at that. Anyone who works for room and board nowadays is supposed to be crazy; but I happen to have a dislike for money. The Scotchman got the idea I was a brownie."

The word should have meant something to me, but not very much. I was sure it had something to do with superstition, though; something about little men who went around doing things for people until somebody tried to pay them, or they were driven away.

"Sort of an elf?" I hazarded.

"Sort of; you might call them Scotch elves. They tended the cows or children, cleaned up the house of a woman who was sick, and made themselves useful in any way they could, though hardly anyone ever saw them work. Mostly they worked at nights, and all they wanted was a cranny in a barn where they could sleep and a bowl of food left for them once or twice a day. If anyone tried to force other payment on them, they had to leave."

"That doesn't sound like the sort of person a farmer should object to."

"Well, there's more to the superstition than that. It seems that they could do ill as well as good. Make the milk turn sour, cause a cow to go dry, and the like. Any time they were displeased, it was bad business. Sometimes the people got together and drove them away, and that was always the wrong thing to do. So when I come around dressed in brown and working for their wages, a few people got worried."

I could see where he'd worry some people, but more from curiosity than fear. "But the brownies, if I remember right, were supposed to be little short fellows. And I never read about their smoking or doing work in the newspaper line."

"Oh, I'm not suggesting I am one." He grinned with a hint of puckish amusement. "That sort of superstition has pretty well died out, any way, and sensible people—like us—know there couldn't be such things. Still, if there were, I imagine they'd be modernized by now. They'd have to be more human looking to mix with men, and they'd have to adapt themselves to city life, perhaps. Of course, some of the old rules might still apply."

I wondered whether he was telling me all that in the hope of discouraging further questions, or whether he had some other purpose in mind. But that was his business. "Maybe they would change, if there were such things," I agreed. "How about staying here tonight? That cot of Thompson's won't be overly comfortable."

"It'll be all right. Anyhow, Thompson's putting me to work making general repairs tomorrow morning, so I'll be up early. See you in the afternoon, Luke."

As he disappeared toward the yard, I had a crazy idea that he'd do more than sleep during the night. Maybe it was what he'd been saying that caused it.

Jim Thompson came in the next morning with a smile that was so genuine it had to mean money for him. "That Anything's what I call a worker," he greeted me. "Does more work than any six men I ever had, and I don't have to stand watch over him, neither. Just goes off by himself and first thing I know, he's back asking for more."

"He's the best helper I ever had," I agreed. "How'd your wife like the article I ran on him in this week's paper?"

"Oh, fine, fine. 'Bout time you got it out, too. She says it's just what she wanted to know."

I'd had other compliments on the item, too. Anything had succeeded beautifully in telling everybody what they wanted to know without actually telling a thing; but I didn't explain that to Jim.

He drew some wrinkled sheets out of his pocket, covered with what he called writing, and I knew there was more advertising to be had from him. "Got a little job for you, Luke. Want you to run some handbills for me, like it says here."

"Which is—"

"When you ever gonna learn to read?" He snorted at that for the hundredth time. "O. K., just say I'm willing to contract for repairs around town to cost only the price of the lumber and hardware. I'll furnish the labor free for this week to anyone wanting work of that kind done. Town sorta needs a lot of repairs, I guess, and it's a good time for 'em."

When Jim offered free labor, it meant that it *was* free—especially to Jim. "You'll get the value of your cot out of Anything, won't you?" I asked.

I had to admit that Anything was a good worker. When I'd opened the office that morning, I'd found an envelope inside the door with half a dozen news items in it; as I'd guessed, Anything hadn't wasted the night. "Sam White's figuring on cutting in on it, too. He called up this morning wanting Anything to help with a couple of cars when we're not using him."

"Sam's a chiseler, always has been." He rounded up a scratch pad and eraser and pocketed them. "You make him fork over for Anything's board, or you'll be a fool. By the way, you hear about Olsen's sick horse?"

"No. The vet finally succeed in curing it?"

"Vet didn't have a thing to do with it, though he claims he done it all. Olsen woke up this morning and there the horse was, r'aring to go." Thompson filled his pipe and picked up a couple of red pencils. "You get the handbills out right away, Luke. I'm expecting to sell a smart bit of lumber this week."

Jim sold more than a smart bit. By the time the week

was almost up, there wasn't a house in town that didn't have some of Anything's work in it, and several houses were practically made over. Where he found time for the work, was a mystery that puzzled everyone except Thompson.

Anything worked when people were away from home, and there were rumors that he had a staff of assistants, but no one ever saw them. Molly Thompson had started that idea and the rumor that Anything was a millionaire come to town to rebuild it secretly; somebody else added that he was planning on opening a factory there, which explained his interest in Carlsburg. There were other contradictory rumors, too, but that was the normal course of events in the town.

All I knew was that Anything could do more newspaper work in part of an afternoon than any other man could turn out in a week, and better work, at that. If he stayed in town long enough, paid subscriptions should be doubled at the end of the year. Sam White felt the same about his garage business.

And then the Carlsburg Culture Club held its monthly meeting, and the rumors that had been drifting around were focused in one small group. As a clearing house for scandal, the Culture Club acted with an efficiency that approached absolute. But since it was purely for women, I had to wait for the results of the meeting until the sound and fury were over and Molly Thompson brought in the minutes for publication.

She usually came in about nine in the morning, but this time she was late. It was nearly ten when Anything opened the door and walked in, and I was still waiting.

"Good morning, Luke," he said. "Is that bed over at your place still open to me?"

I nodded. "Sure is, Anything. What's the matter with the cot and why aren't you working for Jim this morning?"

"Carlsburg Culture Club," he answered. But his grin was a little sour, and he sat back in the chair without offering to do anything around the place. "Molly'll be calling you up in a couple of minutes, I guess, and you'll hear all the dirt then. Got a cigarette, Luke?"

When Anything asked for something, it was news good for two-inch type, purple ink and all. I handed him the cigarette and reached over to answer the phone that was beginning to ring. "Carlsburg *Union Leader*; editor speaking."

Molly's shrill voice tapped in over the wire, syllables spilling all over each other. "Don't you 'editor' me, Luke Short; I know your voice. You want them minutes, or don't you?"

"Of course I do, Mrs. Thompson. People always want to know what happened at the Culture Club." Personally, I doubted whether ten people, club members excepted, cared enough to know they were printed; I'd always begrudged the ink that put them on paper.

"You ain't fooling me with that soft soap. But you do want our 'scriptions, don't you? There's over forty of us, and we can make a lot of other people stop 'scribing, too. You want our 'scriptions?"

The line was old; I usually heard it six times a year, and in eight years, the words hadn't changed. "Now, Mrs. Thompson, you know I want your subscriptions. What can I do for you this time?"

"Humph! Well, you better want 'em." She stopped for a dramatic pause and drew in her breath for a properly impressive explosion. "Then you get rid of that Anything, Luke Short! You hear me, you get him outta there today. You 'n' that husband of mine, mixing up with him like you had a bargain, just 'cause you're too stingy to hire honest workers. I'll tell you, I put a bug in Jim's ear, and he won't try *that* again. And that Anything—a-telling me he was a millionaire trying to build up the town! Humph!"

I tried to calm her down and be patient. "Now, Mrs. Thompson, I'm sure you'll remember he never said that. I knew, of course, that several rumors were going around, but I can assure you he was responsible for none of them."

"Like fun he wasn't. Every member of the club heard a different story, and everyone of them heard it *personal* from him. They told me so themselves. Wasn't no two alike!" Which was undoubtedly true; rumors in Carlsburg always were heard "personal" from the person concerned, according to reports. "And look what he done!"

Anything had come over and had his ear within a few inches of the receiver—as near as his eardrums could stand. He was grinning. Molly Thompson went on with a truly religious zeal.

"Going around doing all that work. It don't fool *me*. He had a *purpose*, and you be sure it wasn't for nobody's good. Besides, look at Olsen's horse. And Turner's boy that got bit by a hyderfoby dog and never even felt it. And look at them gardens were nobody ever finds any weeds or quack grass any more. Fanny Forbes saw him working in her garden one night. He's up to everything funny that's going on in the town, doing free work just to fool you men into thinking he's your friend. It's a good thing us women keep our eyes open, or you'd all wake up with your throats cut some morning."

I remembered another stranger who'd come to town before and shut himself up in a house, hardly coming out. The Culture Club had decided he was a famous swindler and tried to instigate tar-and-feather proceedings. They almost succeeded, too, when it was learned he was a writer trying to fulfill a contract for a book. Everything that was mysterious was evil to the club.

But I still tried to keep the peace. "I can't see any wrong in what has been done. He merely told us he could do anything, and kept his word. Surely that's nothing against the man."

"Anything! I'd like to see a person who could do anything at all. If I couldn't name a hundred things nobody could do, I'd eat my shoes. And him saying he could do anything!"

"So far, he's done what he claimed, Mrs. Thompson, and I'm not firing him for that."

She choked on it, and then snickered in greasy nastiness. "I'll just show you whether he can do anything. If he'll do just what I want him to, you keep him and

I'll not say another word. If he don't, you fire him. That a bet?"

Anything nodded, but I didn't like the sound of it. "Lord knows what she's got in mind," I warned him. He nodded again, emphatically, and there was little humor in his smile.

"It's a bet. You tell him what you want," I answered, handing Anything the phone.

She must have lowered her voice, because I couldn't hear what she said next. But Anything's smile grew sharp and pointed, and there was something on his face I'd never seen before, and didn't want to see again. His usual soft voice was low and crisp as he finally spoke into the instrument.

"As you wish, Mrs. Thompson. It's already done."

There was a sudden shriek over the phone, and he put the receiver back on its hook. "Come on, Luke," he said. "I'm afraid I got you into trouble that time, and I'm sorry about it. Let's go home and see what happens."

Well, the paper was all made up, ready to be turned out the next day, and there wasn't much left to do. During the week I'd learned to respect Anything's judgment, and I had a hunch that this was one of the times to follow his advice. In five minutes, the shop was closed, the curtains down, and we were heading back to my bungalow.

"You won't believe it, Luke, so don't ask questions," was all he would tell me. "She asked something she thought impossible, and I did it. Matter of fact, you ought to kick me out, and not be seen with me again."

That shriek over the telphone had suggested the same; but I liked the fellow. "I'll stick," I told him. "And when you get ready to talk, I'll listen. How about a little work in the garden this afternoon?"

We didn't do much work, and at Anything's suggestion, we made an early supper of it, leaving the dishes unwashed and sitting around smoking. He seemed to be waiting for something, or listening to something.

"You got any good friends in town, Luke?" he asked finally. "I mean, somebody you can really depend on in a pinch?"

"There's Sam White. He'd lend me his last clean shirt. And he's a pretty good friend of yours, if I'm not mistaken."

"He seemed pretty square. You and he were the only ones who treated me like a white man." Anything stood up and began pacing around uneasily, going out to the door and back. "Why doesn't that messenger come?"

"What messenger?"

"Special delivery letter for you. Don't ask me how I know, either." He was standing on the porch, staring down the street. "Ah, there he is now. Go out and sign for it, Luke."

"Special delivery for Lucian Short," the man said. He avoided my eyes, though I'd known him half my life, seized the signed book, and scurried back to the car. I grunted and went back inside.

The letter was short:

> Your letter, requesting a chance to work with us has come to my attention. At present, we are looking for a man to fill the position of City Editor, soon to be vacated. We have checked your references and examined your previous work, and believe you are particularly qualified for this position. Please report at once.

It was signed by the managing editor of the Chicago *Daily Blade*, a paper I'd been trying to get on for years; but I hadn't tried for the City Desk.

I grunted, holding it out for Anything's inspection. "They don't hire men that way—not for jobs like that on a Chicago paper."

He chuckled. "It seems they did. Maybe that will solve the problem. You'll be leaving on the 7:10 bus, I reckon. Better answer the phone, Luke, while I pack up your things. It's been ringing a couple of minutes now."

With clumsy hands I stuffed the envelope into my pocket and made a dash for the phone, buzzing its head off. Sam White's voice answered.

"Luke, for the love of Pete, is Anything there?"

"He is."

"Well, get him out of town! Get out of town yourself until this blows over. You're mixed up with him, and they're crazy enough to do any fool thing."

"What's up?" I'd expected something, and the expectation had been growing all afternoon, but nothing that justified the frantic urge in Sam's voice.

"The town's gone gaga, Luke! Absolutely nuts! Molly Thompson, the two Elkridge sisters, the whole Culture Club and some besides, have been stirring up people since before noon. Nobody's in his right mind. They're talking about a lynching party!"

That *was* strong. "Lynching party? You're drunk, Sam. We haven't killed anybody."

"Worse than that. They've gone back to the Middle Ages, I'll swear they have. I don't know nor care how he did it, but Anything's gone too far for them. They're talking about witchcraft and his being either Satan or a substitute for him. I thought this was a civilized town, but it's not. They're all drunk on superstition and fear."

"Sam, slow down and make sense!" His words were jumbled together until I could hardly understand him. "What happened?"

Sam caught his breath and slowed down a little. "Seems Anything hexed Molly and the Elkridges. You know how fat they were? Well, they're the thinnest, scrawniest women in town now. Molly doesn't weigh over eighty pounds! You've got to leave town before they really get stirred up. You can still make it, but give them another hour and hell's gonna pop! Get out, Luke!"

So that was what the screech over the phone had meant. At heart, I knew people hadn't changed much in the last thousand years, and I could imagine what was going on. "O. K., Sam, and thanks," I said, cutting off his expostulations. "I just got a job in Chicago, and I'm going there. *Daily Blade.*"

Relief was heavy in his voice. "That's fine, Luke. I'll see you in Chicago. My brother has a garage there,

and he wants me to join him. Just got a special delivery from him. After tonight, I don't want another thing to do with this crazy bunch. Make it as quick as you can."

"I'm leaving now." Anything had just come down with the bags. The furniture was furnished with the house, and I hadn't acquired much except a few books. "See you in Chicago."

The line went dead, and I grabbed for a bag. "We're leaving, Anything. Sam says the town's out for blood."

He nodded and shouldered the two heaviest bags. "I kind of thought that might happen. But when she asked me to make her thin, I couldn't resist the opportunity. Hope you're not mad?"

I wasn't. The whole thing struck me as funny—if we got out all right. The bus station, really only a covered platform, was on the other side of town, and I'd have to catch it to Winona and transfer to a Chicago train there. No train would pass through Carlsburg before ten o'clock. But the whole main street lay between my house and the bus stop.

We walked along in silence. There were people ahead, crowded into little groups, talking in low voices with excited gestures. As they saw us coming, they drew back and dispersed quickly. For a half block on each side of us, the street was deserted, but they reformed their groups after we had passed. Watching them do that, I quickened my steps, but Anything pulled me back.

"Take it easy," he urged. "They haven't reached the boiling point, but they're pretty close to it. If we take our time, we'll make it, but let them think we're running from them, or afraid of them, and they'll be on us in a jiffy."

It made sense, and I calmed down, but cold shocks kept running up and down my backbone. Even the dogs around us seemed to slink along with their tails between their legs. When a whole town turns on a man in one day, it isn't the pleasantest thing in the world.

Anything grinned easily, and his voice was mocking. "Somehow, Luke, I don't think people will like living here much any more. The town seems sort of dingy and dinky, doesn't it?"

I hadn't noticed, but now I did. Up ahead, things still looked reasonably well-kept and attractive, but as we drew nearer, I noticed that the paint seemed dirty and about to scale off, the buildings seemed about to crumble in, and there was an air of gloom and sickness about the town. Behind us it was worse. There was no real difference that I could see, but the change was there. No, people weren't going to enjoy living in Carlsburg.

We came up to Sam White's garage, now closed for the night, but there seemed to be nothing wrong with the place. Anything nodded. "Cheerful here, isn't it? Well, each town has its own bright spots. And there's your office. Own any of the paper, Luke?"

I shook my head, and noticed the same desolation fall on the *Union Leader* office. Even the people on the street behind seemed different. Before, they had been ordinary people, but now they looked older, more frustrated, like ghosts come back to haunt a place after its use was done. The dogs were howling dismally, and I could see none on the street now.

It was a relief to see the bus stop come into view, and then feel its platform under my feet. It lacked two minutes of being time for the bus, but topping a hill in the distance, I could make out the amber glow of its lights in the growing dusk.

I turned to Anything. "Where are you going now?"

"Think I'll take that side road there, and head west this time." It might have been a week-end trip for all the emotion he showed.

"Better come with me; maybe we can get you a job on the *Blade*. You're too good a printer and newspaperman for small towns."

He grinned. "I'll be all right, Luke, but thanks for all you've done. Some day, maybe, I'll look you up in Chicago."

I nodded and glanced off toward the approaching bus. "So long, Anything, and good luck." Then the question that had been bothering me for a week finally came to my lips. "Just what kind of a man are you, anyway?"

But as I turned back to him, there was no need of an answer. Where he had been, a little brown man, stocky and with a large head, was walking down the road. His clothes were fashioned like something out of a child's storybook, and he carried a little bag on a pole over his shoulder. As I looked, he turned his head back, and there was a purring chuckle in his answer.

"A brownie. So long, Luke."

And then the bus pulled up and cut off my view of the best newspaperman that ever hexed a town.

THE END.

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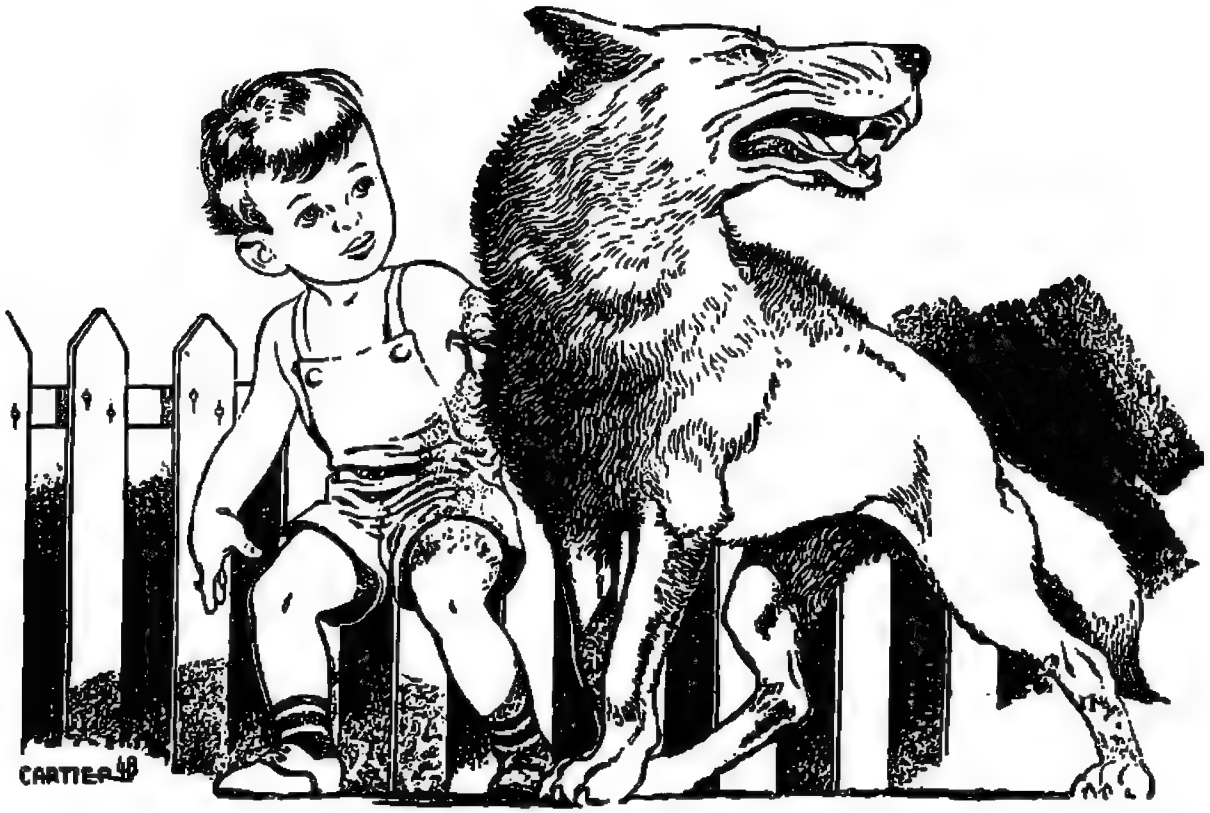

THE COMPLEAT WEREWOLF

BY ANTHONY BOUCHER

It would, of course, take a famous detective story author to appreciate the full possibilities of lycanthropy —

Author's note: In my criminological researches, I have occasionally come across references to an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation who bids fair to become as great a figure of American legend as Paul Bunyan or John Henry. This man is invulnerable to bullets. He strikes such terror into criminals as to drive them to suicide or madness. He sometimes vanishes from human ken entirely, and at other times he is reported to have appeared with equal suddenness stark naked. And perhaps the most curious touch of all, he engages in a never-ceasing quest, of Arthurian intensity, for someone who can perform the Indian rope trick.

Only recently, after intensive probings in Berkeley, where I have certain fortunate connections particularly with the department of German, and a few grudging confidences from my old friend Fergus O'Breen, have I been able to piece together the facts behind this legend.

Here, then, is the story, with only one important detail suppressed, and that, I assure you, strictly for your own good.

The professor glanced at the note:

Don't be silly—Gloria.

Wolfe Wolf crumpled the sheet of paper into a yellow ball and hurled it out the window into the sunshine of the bright campus spring. He made several choice and profane remarks in fluent Middle High German.

Emily looked up from typing the proposed budget for the departmental library. "I'm afraid I didn't understand that, Professor Wolf. I'm weak on Middle High."

"Just improvising," said Wolf, and sent a copy of the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* to follow the telegram.

Emily rose from the typewriter. "There's something

the matter. Did the committee reject your monograph on Hager?"

"That monumental contribution to human knowledge? Oh, no. Nothing so important as that."

"But you're so upset—"

"The office wife!" Wolf snorted. "And pretty polyandrous at that, with the whole department on your hands. Go 'way."

Emily's dark little face lit up with a flame of righteous anger that removed any trace of plainness. "Don't talk to me like that, Mr. Wolf. I'm simply trying to help you. And it isn't the whole department. It's—"

Professor Wolf picked up an inkwell, looked after the telegram and the "Journal," then set the glass pot down again. "No. There are better ways of going to pieces. Sorrows drown easier than they smash— Get Herbrecht to take my two o'clock, will you?"

"Where are you going?"

"To hell in sectors. So long."

"Wait. Maybe I can help you. Remember when the dean jumped you for serving drinks to students? Maybe I can—"

Wolf stood in the doorway and extended one arm impressively, pointing with that curious index which was as long as the middle finger. "Madam, academically you are indispensable. You are the prop and stay of the existence of this department. But at the moment this department can go to hell, where it will doubtless continue to need your invaluable services."

"But don't you see—" Emily's voice shook. "No. Of course not: You wouldn't see. You're just a man—no, not even a man. You're just Professor Wolf. You're Woof-woof."

Wolf staggered. "I'm what?"

"Woof-woof. That's what everybody calls you because your name's Wolfe Wolf. All your students, everybody. But you wouldn't notice a thing like that. Oh, no. Woof-woof, that's what you are."

"This," said Wolfe Wolf, "is the crowning blow. My heart is breaking, my world is shattered, I've got to walk a mile from the campus to find a bar; but all this isn't enough. I've got to be called Woof-woof. Good-by!"

He turned, and in the doorway caromed into a vast and yielding bulk, which gave out with a noise that might have been either a greeting of "Wolf!" or more probably an inevitable grunt of "Oof!"

Wolf backed into the room and admitted Professor Fearing, paunch, pince-nez, cane and all. The older man waddled over to his desk, plumped himself down, and exhaled a long breath. "My dear boy," he gasped. "Such impetuosity."

"Sorry, Oscar."

"Ah, youth—" Professor Fearing fumbled about for a handkerchief, found none, and proceeded to polish his pince-nez on his somewhat stringy necktie. "But why such haste to depart? And why is Emily crying?"

"Is she?"

"You see?" said Emily hopelessly, and muttered "Woof-woof" into her damp handkerchief.

"And why do copies of the JEGP fly about my head as I harmlessly cross the campus? Do we have teleportation on our hands?"

"Sorry," Wolf repeated curtly. "Temper. Couldn't stand that ridiculous argument of Glocke's. Good-by."

"One moment." Professor Fearing fished into one of his unnumbered handkerchiefless pockets and produced a sheet of yellow paper. "I believe this is yours?"

Wolf snatched at it and quickly converted it into confetti.

Fearing chuckled. "How well I remember when Gloria was a student here! I was thinking of it only last night when I saw her in 'Moonbeams and Melody.' How she did upset this whole department! Heavens, my boy, if I'd been a younger man myself—"

"I'm going. You'll see about Herbrecht, Emily?"

Emily sniffled and nodded.

"Come, Wolfe." Fearing's voice had grown more serious. "I didn't mean to plague you. But you mustn't take these things too hard. There are better ways of finding consolation than in losing your temper or getting drunk."

"Who said anything about—"

"Did you need to say it? No, my boy, if you were to— You're not a religious man, are you?"

"Good God, no," said Wolf contradictorily.

"If only you were— If I might make a suggestion, Wolf, why don't you come over to the Temple tonight? We're having very special services. They might take your mind off Glo—off your troubles."

"Thanks, no. I've always meant to visit your Temple —I've heard rumors about it—but not tonight. Some other time."

"Tonight would be especially interesting."

"Why? What's so special about April 30th?"

Fearing shook his gray head. "It is shocking how ignorant a scholar can be outside of his chosen field— But you know the place, Wolfe; I'll hope to see you there tonight."

"Thanks. But my troubles don't need any supernatural solutions. A couple of zombies will do nicely, and I do *not* mean serviceable stiffs. Good-by, Oscar." He was halfway through the door before he added as an afterthought, "'By, Emily."

"Such rashness," Fearing murmured. "Such impetuosity. Youth is a wonderful thing to enjoy, is it not, Emily?"

Emily said nothing, but plunged into typing the proposed budget as though all the fiends of hell were after her, as indeed many of them were.

The sun was setting, and Wolfe's tragic account of his troubles had laid an egg, too. The bartender had polished every glass in the joint and still the repetitive tale kept pouring forth. He was torn between a boredom new even in his experience and a professional admiration for a customer who could consume zombies indefinitely.

"Did I tell you about the time she flunked the mid term?" Wolf demanded truculently.

"Only three times," said the bartender.

"All right, then; I'll tell you. Yunnerstand, I don't do things like this. Profeshical ethons, that's what's I've got. But this was different. This wasn't like somebody that doesn't know just because she doesn't know; this was a girl that didn't know because she wasn't the kind of girl that has to know the kind of things a girl has to know if she's the kind of girl that ought to know that kind of things. Yunnerstand?"

The bartender cast a calculating glance at the plump little man who sat alone at the end of the deserted bar, carefully nursing his gin-and-tonic.

"She made me see that. She made me see lossa things and I can still see the things she made me see the things. It wasn't just like a professor falls for a coed, yunnerstand? This was different. This was wunnaful. This was like a whole new life like."

The bartender sidled down to the end of the bar. "Brother," he whispered softly.

The little man with the odd beard looked up from his gin-and-tonic. "Yes, colleague?"

"If I listen to that potted professor another five minutes, I'm going to start smashing up the joint. How's about slipping down there and standing in for me, huh?"

The little man looked Wolf over and fixed his gaze especially on the hand that clenched the tall zombie glass. "Gladly, colleague," he nodded.

The bartender sighed a gust of relief.

"She was Youth," Wolf was saying intently to where the bartender had stood. "But it wasn't just that. This was different. She was Life and Excitement and Joy and Ecstasy and Stuff. Yunner—" He broke off and stared at the empty space. *"Uh-mazing!"* he observed. "Right before my very eyes. *Uh-mazing!*"

"You were saying, colleague?" the plump little man prompted from the adjacent stool.

Wolf turned. "So there you are. Did I tell you about the time I went to her house to check her term paper?"

"No. But I have a feeling you will."

"Howja know? Well, this night—"

The little man drank slowly; but his glass was empty by the time Wolf had finished the account of an evening of pointlessly tentative flirtation. Other customers were drifting in, and the bar was now about a third full.

"—and ever since then—" Wolf broke off sharply. "That isn't you," he objected.

"I think it is, colleague."

"But you're a bartender and *you* aren't a bartender."

"No. I'm a magician."

"Oh. That explains it. Now like I was telling you—Hey! Your bald is beard."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Your bald is beard. Just like your head. It's all jussa fringe running around."

"I like it that way."

"And your glass is empty."

"That's all right, too."

"Oh, no, it isn't. It isn't every night you get to drink with a man that proposed to Gloria Garton and got turned down. This is an occasion for celebration." Wolf thumped loudly on the bar and held up his first two fingers.

The little man regarded their equal length. "No," he said softly. "I think I'd better not. I know my capacity. If I have another—well, things might start happening."

"Lettemappen!"

"No. Please, colleague. I'd rather—"

The bartender brought the drinks. "Go on, brother," he whispered. "Keep him quiet. I'll do you a favor sometime."

Reluctantly the little man sipped at his fresh gin-and-tonic.

The professor took a gulp of his nth zombie. "My name's Woof-woof," he proclaimed. "Lots of people call me Wolfe Wolf. They think that's funny. But it's really Woof-woof. Wazoors?"

The other paused a moment to decipher that Arabic-sounding word, then said, "Mine's Ozymandias the Great."

"That's a funny name."

"I told you I'm a magician. Only I haven't worked for a long time. Theatrical managers are peculiar, colleague. They don't want a real magician. They won't even let me show 'em my best stuff. Why, I remember one night in Darjeeling—"

"Glad to meet you, Mr. . . . Mr.—"

"You can call me Ozzy. Most people do."

"Glad to meet you, Ozzy. Now about this girl. This Gloria. Yunnerstand, donya?"

"Sure, colleague."

"She thinks being a professor of German is nothing. She wants something glamorous. She says if I was an actor now or a G-man— Yunnerstand?"

Ozymandias the Great nodded.

"Awright, then! So yunnerstand. Fine. But whatddayou want to keep talking about it for? Yunnerstand. That's that. To hell with it."

Ozymandias' round and fringed face brightened. "Sure," he said, and added recklessly, "Let's drink to that."

They clinked glasses and drank. Wolf carelessly tossed off a toast in Old Low Frankish, with an unpardonable error in the use of the genitive.

The two men next to them began singing "My Wild Irish Rose," but trailed off disconsolately. "What we need," said the one with the derby, "is a tenor."

"What I need," Wolf muttered, "is a cigarette."

"Sure," said Ozymandias the Great. The bartender was drawing beer directly in front of them. Ozymandias reached across the bar, removed a lighted cigarette from the barkeep's ear, and handed it to his companion.

"Where'd that come from?"

"I don't quite know. All I know is how to get them. I told you I was a magician."

"Oh. I see. Pressajijijation."

"No. Not a prestidigitator; I said a magician. Oh, blast it! I've done it again. More than one gin-and-tonic and I start showing off."

"I don't believe you," said Wolf flatly. "No such thing as magicians. That's just as silly as Oscar Fearing and his Temple and what's so special about April 30th, anyway?"

The bearded man frowned. "Please, colleague. Let's forget it."

"No. I don't believe you. You pressajijijated that cigarette. You didn't magic it." His voice began to rise. "You're a fake."

"Please, brother," the barkeep whispered. "Keep him quiet."

"All right," said Ozymandias wearily. "I'll show you something that can't be prestidigitation." The couple adjoining had begun to sing again. "They need a tenor. All right; listen!"

And the sweetest, most ineffably Irish tenor ever heard joined in on the duet. The singers didn't worry about the source; they simply accepted the new voice gladly and were spurred on to their very best, with the result that the bar knew the finest harmony it had heard since the night the Glee Club was suspended en masse.

Wolf looked impressed, but shook his head. "That's not magic, either. That's ventriloquism."

"As a matter of strict fact, that was a street singer who was killed in the Easter Rebellion. Fine fellow, too; never heard a better voice unless it was that night in Darjeeling when—"

"Fake!" said Wolfe Wolf loudly and belligerently.

Ozymandias once more contemplated that long index finger. He looked at the professor's dark brows that met in a straight line over his nose. He picked his companion's limpish hand off the bar and scrutinized the palm. The growth of hair was not marked, but it was perceptible.

The magician chortled. "And you sneer at magic!"

"Whasso funny about me sneering at magic?"

Ozymandias lowered his voice. "Because, my fine furry friend, you are a werewolf."

The Irish martyr had begun "Rose of Tralee" and the two mortals were joining in valiantly.

"I'm what?"

"A werewolf."

"But there isn't any such thing. Any fool knows that."

"Fools," said Ozymandias, "know a great deal which the wise do not. There are werewolves. There always have been, and quite probably always will be." He spoke as calmly and assuredly as though he were mentioning that the earth was round. "And there are three infallible physical signs; the meeting eyebrows, the long index finger, the hairy palms. You have all three. And even your name is an indication. Family names do not come from nowhere. Every Smith has an ancestor somewhere who was a Smith. Every Fisher comes from a family that once fished. And your name is Wolf."

The statement was so quiet, so plausible, that Wolf faltered. "But a werewolf is a man that changes into a wolf. I've never done that. Honest I haven't."

"A mammal," said Ozymandias, "is an animal that bears its young alive and suckles them. A virgin is nonetheless a mammal. Because you have never changed does not make you any the less a werewolf."

"But a werewolf—" Suddenly Wolf's eyes lit up. "A werewolf! But that's even better than a G-man! Now I can show Gloria!"

"What on earth do you mean, colleague?"

Wolf was climbing down from his stool. The intense excitement of this brilliant new idea seemed to have sobered him. He grabbed the little man by the sleeve. "Come on. We're going to find a nice quiet place. And you're going to prove you're a magician."

"But how?"

"You're going to show me how to change!"

Ozymandias finished his gin-and-tonic, and with it drowned his last regretful hesitation. "Colleague," he announced, "you're on!"

Professor Oscar Fearing, standing behind the curiously carved lectern of the Temple of the Dark Truth, concluded the reading of the prayer with mumbling sonority. "And on this night of all nights, in the name of the black light that glows in the darkness, we give thanks!" He closed the parchment-bound book and faced the small congregation, calling out with fierce intensity, "Who wishes to give his thanks to the Lower Lord?"

A cushioned dowager rose. "I give thanks!" she shrilled excitedly. "My Ming Choy was sick, even unto death. I took of her blood and offered it to the Lower Lord, and he had mercy and restored her to me!"

Behind the altar an electrician checked his switches and spat disgustedly. "Bugs! Every last one of 'em!"

The man who was struggling into a grotesque and horrible costume paused and shrugged. "They pay good money. What's it to us if they're bugs?"

A tall, thin, old man had risen uncertainly to his feet. "I give thanks!" he cried. "I give thanks to the Lower Lord that I have finished my great work. My protective screen against magnetic bombs is a tried and proven success, to the glory of our country and science and the Lord."

"Crackpot," the electrician muttered.

The man in costume peered around the altar. "Crackpot, hell! That's Chiswick from the physics department. Think of a man like that falling for this stuff! And listen to him: He's even telling about the government's plans for installation. You know, I'll bet you one of these fifth columnists could pick up something around here."

There was silence in the Temple when the congregation had finished its Thanksgiving. Professor Fearing leaned over the lectern and spoke quietly and impressively. "As you know, brothers in Darkness, tonight is May Eve, the 30th of April, the night consecrated by the Church to that martyr missionary St. Walpurgis, and by us to other and deeper purposes. It is on this night, and this night only, that we may directly give our thanks to the Lower Lord himself. Not in wanton orgy and obscenity, as the Middle Ages misconceived his desires,

but in praise and in deep, dark joy that issues forth from Blackness."

"Hold your hats, boys," said the man in the costume. "Here I go again."

"Eka!" Fearing thundered. *"Dva tri chatur! Pancha! Shas sapta! Ashta nava dasha ekadasha!"* He paused. There was always the danger that at this moment some scholar in this university town might recognize that the invocation, though perfect Sanskrit, consisted solely of the numbers from one to eleven. But no one stirred, and he launched forth in more apposite Latin: *"Per vota nostra ispe nunc surgat nobis dicatus Baal Zebub!"*

"Baal Zebub!" the congregation chorused.

"Cue," said the electrician, and pulled a switch.

The lights flickered and went out. Lightning played across the sanctuary. Suddenly out of the darkness came a sharp bark, a yelp of pain, and a long-drawn howl of triumph.

A blue light now began to glow dimly. In the faint reflection of this, the electrician was amazed to see his costumed friend at his side, nursing his bleeding hand.

"What the—" the electrician whispered.

"Hanged if I know. I go out there on cue, all ready to make my terrifying appearance, and what happens? Great big dog up and nips my hand. Why didn't they tell me they'd switched the script?"

In the glow of the blue light the congregation reverently contemplated the plump little man with the fringe of beard and the splendid gray wolf that stood beside him. "Hail, O Lower Lord!" resounded the chorus, drowning out one spinster's murmur of "But my *dear*, I *swear* he was *much* handsomer last year."

"Colleagues!" said Ozymandias the Great, and there was utter silence, a dread hush awaiting the momentous words of the Lower Lord. Ozymandias took one step forward, placed his tongue carefully between his lips, uttered the ripest, juiciest raspberry of his career, and vanished, wolf and all.

Wolfe Wolf opened his eyes and shut them again hastily. He had never expected the quiet and sedate Berkeley Inn to install centrifugal rooms. It wasn't fair. He lay in darkness, waiting for the whirling to stop and trying to reconstruct the past night.

He remembered the bar all right, and the zombies. And the bartender. Very sympathetic chap that, up until he suddenly changed into a little man with a fringe of beard. That was where things began getting strange. There was something about a cigarette and an Irish tenor and a werewolf. Fantastic idea, that. Any fool knows—

Wolf sat up suddenly. He *was* the werewolf. He threw back the bedclothes and stared down at his legs. Then he sighed relief. They were long legs. They were hairy enough. They were brown from much tennis. But they were indisputably human.

He got up, resolutely stifling his qualms, and began to pick up the clothing that was scattered nonchalantly about the floor. A crew of gnomes was excavating his skull, but he hoped they might go away if he didn't pay too much attention to them. One thing was certain; he was going to be good from now on. Gloria or no Gloria, heartbreak or no heartbreak, drowning your sorrows wasn't good enough. If you felt like this and could imagine you'd been a werewolf—

But why should he have imagined it in such detail? So many fragmentary memories seemed to come back as he dressed. Going up Strawberry Canyon with the fringed beard, finding a desolate and isolated spot for magic, learning the words—He could even remember the words. The word that changed you and the one that changed you back.

Had he made up those words, too, in his drunken imaginings? And had he made up what he could only barely recall—the wonderful, magical freedom of changing, the single, sharp pang of alteration and then the boundless happiness of being lithe and fleet and free?

He surveyed himself in the mirror. He looked exactly what he was, save for the unwonted wrinkles in his conservative single-breasted gray suit: a quiet academician, a little better built, a little more impulsive, a little more romantic than most, perhaps, but still just that—Professor Wolf.

The rest was nonsense. But there was, that impulsive side of him suggested, only one way of proving the fact. And that was to say The Word.

"All right," said Wolfe Wolf to his reflection. "I'll show you." And he said it.

The pang was sharper and stronger than he'd remembered. Alcohol numbs you to pain. It tore him for a moment with an anguish like the descriptions of childbirth. Then it was gone, and he flexed his limbs in happy amazement. But he was not a lithe, fleet, free beast. He was a helplessly trapped wolf, irrevocably entangled in a conservative, single-breasted gray suit.

He tried to rise and walk, but the long sleeves and legs tripped him over flat on his muzzle. He kicked with his paws, trying to tear his way out, and then stopped. Werewolf or no werewolf, he was likewise still Professor Wolf, and this suit had cost thirty-five dollars. There must be some cheaper way of securing freedom than tearing the suit to shreds.

He used several good, round, Low German expletives. This was a complication that wasn't in any of the werewolf legends he'd ever read. There, people just—boom!—became wolves or—bang!—became men again. When they were men, they wore clothes; when they were wolves, they wore fur. Just like Hyperman becoming Bark Lent again on top of the Empire State Building and finding his street clothes right there. Most misleading. He began to remember now how Ozymandias the Great had made him strip before teaching him the words—

The words! That was it. All he had to do was say the word that changed you back—*Absarka!*—and he'd be a man again, comfortably fitted inside his suit. Then he could strip and start all over again. You see? Reason solves all. *"Absarka!"* he said.

Or thought he said. He went through all the proper

mental processes for saying *Absarka!* but all that came out of his muzzle was a sort of clicking whine. And he was still a conservatively dressed and helpless wolf.

This was worse than the clothes problem. If he could be released only by saying *Absarka!* and if, being a wolf, he could say nothing, why, there he was. Indefinitely. He could go find Ozzy and ask—but how could a wolf wrapped up in a gray suit get safely out of a hotel and set out hunting for an unknown address?

He was trapped. He was lost. He was—

"Absarka!"

Professor Wolfe Wolf stood up in his grievously rumpled gray suit and beamed on the beard-fringed face of Ozymandias the Great.

"You see, colleague," the little magician explained, "I figured you'd want to try it again as soon as you got up, and I knew darned well you'd have your troubles. Thought I'd come over and straighten things out for you."

Wolf lit a cigarette in silence and handed the pack to Ozymandias. "When you came in just now," he said at last, "what did you see?"

"You as a wolf."

"Then it really— I actually—"

"Sure. You're a full-fledged werewolf, all right."

Wolf sat down on the rumpled bed. "I guess," he ventured slowly, "I've got to believe it. And if I believe that— But it means I've got to believe everything I've always scorned. I've got to believe in gods and devils and hells and—"

"You needn't be so pluralistic. But there is a God." Ozymandias said this as calmly and convincingly as he had stated last night that there were werewolves.

"And if there's a God, then I've got a soul?"

"Sure."

"And if I'm a werewolf— Hey!"

"What's the trouble, colleague?"

"All right, Ozzy. You know everything. Tell me this: Am I damned?"

"For what? Just for being a werewolf? Shucks, no; let me explain. There's two kinds of werewolves. There's the cursed kind that can't help themselves; that just go turning into wolves without any say in the matter; and there's the voluntary kind like you. Now most of the voluntary kind are damned, sure, because they're wicked men who lust for blood and eat innocent people. But they aren't damnably wicked because they're werewolves; they became werewolves because they are damnably wicked. Now you changed yourself just for the fun of it and because it looked like a good way to impress a gal; that's an innocent-enough motive, and being a werewolf doesn't make it any less so. Werewolves don't have to be monsters; it's just that we only hear about the ones that are."

"But how can I be voluntary when you told me I was a werewolf before ever I changed?"

"Not everybody can change. It's like being able to roll your tongue or wiggle your ears. You can, or you can't; and that's that. And, like those abilities, there's probably a genetic factor involved, though nobody's done any serious research on it. You were a werewolf *in posse*; now you're one *in esse*."

"Then it's all right? I can be a werewolf just for having fun, and it's safe?"

"Absolutely."

Wolf chortled. "Will I show Gloria! Dull and unglamorous, indeed! Anybody can marry an actor or a G-man; but a werewolf—"

"Your children probably will be, too," said Ozymandias cheerfully.

Wolf shut his eyes dreamily, then opened them with a start. "You know what?"

"What?"

"I haven't got a hangover any more! This is marvelous. This is— Why, this is practical. At last the perfect hangover cure. Shuffle yourself into a wolf and back and— Oh, that reminds me. How do I get back?"

"Absarka."

"I know. But when I'm a wolf I can't say it."

"That," said Ozymandias sadly, "is the curse of being a white magician. You keep having to use the second-best form of spells, because the best would be black. Sure, a black-magic werebeast can turn himself back whenever he wants to. I remember in Darjeeling—"

"But how about me?"

"That's the trouble. You have to have somebody to say *Absarka!* for you. That's what I did last night, or do you remember? After we broke up the party at your friend's Temple— Tell you what. I'm retired now, and I've got enough to live on modestly because I can always magic up a little— Are you going to take up werewolfing seriously?"

"For a while, anyway. Till I get Gloria."

"Then why shouldn't I come and live here in your hotel? Then I'll always be handy to *Absarka* you. After you get the girl, you can teach her."

Wolf extended his hand. "Noble of you. Shake." And then his eye caught his wrist watch. "I've missed two classes this morning. Werewolfing's all very well, but a man's got to work for his living."

"Most men." Ozymandias calmly reached his hand into the air and plucked a coin. He looked at it ruefully; it was a gold moidore. "Hang these spirits; I simply cannot explain to them about gold being illegal."

"From Los Angeles," Wolf thought, with the habitual contempt of the northern Californian, as he surveyed the careless sport coat and the bright-yellow shirt of his visitor.

This young man rose politely as the professor entered the office. His green eyes gleamed cordially and his red hair glowed in the spring sunlight. "Professor Wolf?" he asked.

Wolf glanced impatiently at his desk. "Yes."

"O'Breen's the name. I'd like to talk to you a minute."

"My office hours are from three to four Tuesdays and Thursdays. I'm afraid I'm rather busy now."

"This isn't faculty business. And it's important." The young man's attitude was affable and casual, but he

managed none the less to convey a sense of urgency that piqued Wolf's curiosity. The all-important letter to Gloria had waited while he took two classes; it could wait another five minutes.

"Very well, Mr. O'Breen."

"And alone, if you please."

Wolf himself hadn't noticed that Emily was in the room. He now turned to the secretary and said, "All right. If you don't mind, Emily—"

Emily shrugged and went out.

"Now, sir. What is this important and secret business?"

"Just a question or two. To start with, how well do you know Gloria Garton?"

Wolf paused. You could hardly say, "Young man, I am about to repropose to her in view of my becoming a werewolf." Instead he simply said—the truth if not the whole truth—"She was a pupil of mine a few years ago."

"I said *do*, not *did*. How well do you know her now?"

"And why should I bother to answer such a question?"

The young man handed over a card. Wolf read:

FERGUS O'BREEN

Private Inquiry Agent

Licensed by the State of California

Wolf smiled. "And what does this mean? Divorce evidence? Isn't that the usual field of private inquiry agents?"

"Miss Garton isn't married, as you probably know very well. I'm just asking you if you've been in touch with her much lately?"

"And I'm simply asking why you should want to know?"

O'Breen rose and began to pace around the office. "We don't seem to be getting very far, do we? I'm to take it that you refuse to state the nature of your relations with Gloria Garton?"

"I see no reason why I should do otherwise." Wolf was beginning to be annoyed.

To his surprise, the detective relaxed into a broad grin. "O. K. Let it ride. Tell me about your department: How long have the various faculty members been here?"

"Instructors and all?"

"Just the professor."

"I've been here for seven years. All the others at least a good ten, probably more. If you want exact figures, you can probably get them from the dean, unless, as I hope"—Wolf smiled cordially—"he throws you out flat on your red pate."

O'Breen laughed. "Professor, I think we could get on. One more question, and you can do some pate-tossing yourself. Are you an American citizen?"

"Of course."

"And the rest of the department?"

"All of them. And now would you have the common decency to give me some explanation of this fantastic farrago of questions?"

"No," said O'Breen casually. "Good-by, professor." His alert, green eyes had been roaming about the room, sharply noticing everything. Now, as he left, they rested on Wolf's long index finger, moved up to his heavy meeting eyebrows, and returned to the finger. There was a suspicion of a startled realization in those eyes as he left the office.

But that was nonsense, Wolf told himself. A private detective, no matter how shrewd his eyes, no matter how apparently meaningless his inquiries, would surely be the last man on earth to notice the signs of lycanthropy.

Funny. Werewolf was a word you could accept. You could say, "I am a werewolf," and it was all right. But say "I am a lycanthrope," and your flesh crawled. Odd. Possibly material for a paper on the influence of etymology on connotation for one of the learned periodicals.

But, hell! Wolfe Wolf was no longer primarily a scholar. He was a werewolf now, a white-magic werewolf, a werewolf-for-fun; and fun he was going to have. He lit his pipe, stared at the blank paper on his desk, and tried desperately to draft a letter to Gloria. It should hint at just enough to fascinate her and hold her interest until he could go south when the term ended and reveal to her the whole wonderful new truth. It—

Professor Oscar Fearing grunted his ponderous way into the office. "Good afternoon, Wolf. Hard at it, my boy?"

"Afternoon," Wolf replied distractedly, and continued to stare at the paper.

"Great events coming, eh? Are you looking forward to seeing the glorious Gloria?"

Wolf started. "How— What do you mean?"

Fearing handed him a folded newspaper. "You hadn't heard?"

Wolf read with growing amazement and delight:

GLORIA GARTON TO ARRIVE FRIDAY

Local Girl Returns to Berkeley

As part of the most spectacular talent hunt since the search for Scarlett O'Hara, Gloria Garton, glamorous Metropolis starlet, will visit Berkeley Friday.

Friday afternoon at the Campus Theater, Berkeley canines will have their chance to compete in the nation-wide quest for a dog to play Tookah the wolf dog in the great Metropolis epic, "Fangs of the Forest," and Gloria Garton herself will be present at the auditions.

"I owe so much to Berkeley," Miss Garton said. "It will mean as much to me to see the campus and the city again." Miss Garton has the starring human role in "Fangs of the Forest."

Miss Garton was a student at the University of California when she received her first chance in films. She is a member of Mask and Dagger, honorary dramatic society, and Rho Rho Rho Sorority.

Wolfe Wolf glowed. This was perfect. No need now to wait till term was over. He could see Gloria now and claim her in all his wolfish vigor. Friday—today was Wednesday—that gave him two nights to prac-

tice and perfect the technique of werewolfry. And then—

He noticed the dejected look on the older professor's face, and a small remorse smote him. "How did things go last night, Oscar?" he asked sympathetically. "How was your big Walpurgis night services?"

Fearing regarded him oddly. "You know that now? Yesterday April 30th meant nothing to you."

"I got curious and looked it up. But how did it go?"

"Well enough," Fearing lied feebly. "Do you know, Wolf," he demanded after a moment's silence, "what is the real curse of every man interested in the occult?"

"No. What?"

"That true power is never enough. Enough for yourself, perhaps, but never enough for others. So that no matter what your true abilities, you must forge on beyond them into charlatanry to convince the others. Look at St. Germain. Look at Francis Stuart. Look at Cagliostro. But the worst tragedy is the next stage; when you realize that your powers were greater than you supposed and that the charlatanry was needless. When you realize that you have no notion of the extent of your powers. Then—"

"Then, Oscar?"

"Then, my boy, you are a badly frightened man."

Wolf wanted to say something consoling. He wanted to say, "Look, Oscar. It was just me. Go back to your half-hearted charlatanry and be happy." But he couldn't do that. Only Ozzy could know the truth of that splendid gray wolf. Only Ozzy and Gloria.

The moon was bright on that hidden spot in the canyon. The night was still. And Wolfe Wolf had a severe case of stage fright. Now that it came to the real thing—for this morning's clothes-complicated fiasco hardly counted and last night he could not truly remember—he was afraid to plunge cleanly into wolfdom and anxious to stall and talk as long as possible.

"Do you think," he asked the magician nervously, "that I could teach Gloria to change, too?"

Ozymandias pondered. "Maybe, colleague. It'd depend. She might have the natural ability, and she might not. And, of course, there's no telling what she might change into."

"You mean she wouldn't necessarily be a wolf?"

"Of course not. The people who can change, change into all sorts of things. And every folk knows best the kind that most interests it. We've got an English and Central European tradition; so we know mostly about werewolves. But take Scandinavia, and you'll hear chiefly about werebears, only they call 'em berserkers. And Orientals, now, they're apt to know about weretigers. Trouble is, we've thought so much about *werewolves* that that's all we know the signs for; I wouldn't know how to spot a weretiger just offhand."

"Then there's no telling what might happen if I taught her The Word?"

"Not the least. Of course, there's some werethings that just aren't much use being. Take like being a wereant. You change and somebody steps on you and that's

that. Or like a fella I knew once in Madagascar. Taught him The Word, and know what? Hanged if he wasn't a werediplodocus. Shattered the whole house into little pieces when he changed and almost trampled me under hoof before I could say *Absarka!* He decided not to make a career of it. Or then there was that time in Darjeeling— But, look, colleague, are you going to stand around here naked all night?"

"No," said Wolf. "I'm going to change now. You'll take my clothes back to the hotel?"

"Sure. They'll be there for you. And I've put a very small spell on the night clerk, just enough for him not to notice wolves wandering in. Oh, and by the way—anything missing from your room?"

"Not that I noticed. Why?"

"Because I thought I saw somebody come out of it this afternoon. Couldn't be sure, but I think he came from there. Young fella with red hair and Hollywood clothes."

Wolfe Wolf frowned. That didn't make sense. Pointless questions from a detective were bad enough, but searching your hotel room— But what were detectives to a full-fledged werewolf? He grinned, nodded a friendly good-by to Ozymandias the Great, and said The Word.

The pain wasn't so sharp as this morning, though still quite bad enough. But it passed almost at once, and his whole body filled with a sense of limitless freedom. He lifted his snout and sniffed deep at the keen freshness of this night air. A whole new realm of pleasure opened up for him through this acute new nose alone. He wagged his tail amicably at Ozzy and set up off the canyon on a long, easy lope.

For hours loping was enough—simply and purely enjoying one's wolfness was the finest pleasure one could

ask. Wolf left the canyon and turned up into the hills, past the Big C and on into noble wildness that seemed far remote from all campus civilization. His brave new legs were stanch and tireless, his wind seemingly inexhaustible. Every turning brought fresh and vivid scents of soil and leaves and air; and life was shimmering and beautiful.

But a few hours of this, and Wolf realized that he was lonely. All this grand exhilaration was very well, but if his mate Gloria were loping by his side— And what fun was it to be something as splendid as a wolf if no one admired you? He began to want people, and he turned back to the city.

Berkeley goes to bed early. The streets were deserted. Here and there a light burned in a rooming house where some solid grind was plodding on his almost-due term paper. Wolf had done that himself. He couldn't laugh in this shape, but his tail twitched with amusement at the thought.

He paused along the tree-lined street. There was a fresh human scent here, though the street seemed empty. Then he heard a soft whimpering, and trotted off toward the noise.

Behind the shrubbery fronting an apartment house sat a disconsolate two-year-old, shivering in his sunsuit and obviously lost for hours on hours. Wolf put a paw on the child's shoulder and shook him gently.

The boy looked around and was not in the least afraid. "He'o," he said, brightening up.

Wolf growled a cordial greeting, and wagged his tail and pawed at the ground to indicate that he'd take the lost infant wherever it wanted to go.

The child stood up and wiped away its tears with a dirty fist which left wide, black smudges. "Tootootootoo!" he said.

Games, thought Wolf. He wants to play choo-choo. He took the child by the sleeve and tugged gently.

"Tootootootoo!" the boy repeated firmly. "Die way."

The sound of a railway whistle, to be sure, does die away; but this seemed a poetic expression for such a toddler, Wolf thought, and then abruptly would have snapped his fingers if he'd had them. The child was saying "2222 Dwight Way," having been carefully brought up to tell its address when lost. Wolf glanced up at the street sign. Bowditch and Hillegas—2222 Dwight would be just a couple of blocks.

Wolf tried to nod his head, but the muscles didn't seem to work that way. Instead he wagged his tail in what he hoped indicated comprehension, and started off leading the child.

The infant beamed and said, "Nice woof-woof."

For an instant Wolf felt like a spy suddenly addressed by his right name, then realized that if some say "bow-wow" others might well say "woof-woof."

He led the child for two blocks without event. It felt good, having an innocent human being put his whole life and trust in your charge like this. There was something about children; he hoped Gloria felt the same. He wondered what would happen if he could teach this confiding infant The Word. It would be swell to have a pup that would—

He paused. His nose twitched and the hair on the back of his neck rose. Ahead of them stood a dog, a huge mongrel, seemingly a mixture of St. Bernard and Husky. But the growl that issued from his throat indicated that carrying brandy kegs or rushing serum was not for him. He was a bandit, an outlaw, an enemy of man and dog. And they had to pass him.

Wolf had no desire to fight. He was as big as this monster and certainly, with his human brain, much cleverer; but scars from a dog fight would not look well on the human body of Professor Wolf, and there was, moreover, the danger of hurting the toddler in the fracas. It would be wiser to cross the street. But before he could steer the child that way, the mongrel brute had charged at them, yapping and snarling.

Wolf placed himself in front of the boy, poised and ready to leap in defense. The scar problem was secondary to the fact that this baby had trusted him. He was ready to face this cur and teach him a lesson, at whatever cost to his own human body. But halfway to him the huge dog stopped. His growls died away to a piteous whimper. His great flanks trembled in the moonlight. His tail curled craven between his legs. And abruptly he turned and fled.

The child crowed delightedly. "Bad woof-woof go way." He put his little arms around Wolf's neck. *"Nice woof-woof."* Then he straightened up and said insistently, "Tootootootoo. Die way," and Wolf led on, his strong wolf's heart pounding as it had never pounded at the embrace of a woman.

"Tootootootoo" was a small, frame house set back from the street in a large yard. The lights were still on, and even from the sidewalk Wolf could hear a woman's shrill voice.

"—aince five o'clock this afternoon, and you've got to find him, officer. You simply must. We've hunted all over the neighborhood and—"

Wolf stood up against the wall on his hindlegs and rang the doorbell with his front right paw.

"Oh! Maybe that's somebody now. The neighbors said they'd— Come, officer, and let's see— Oh!"

At the same moment Wolf barked politely, the toddler yelled "Mamma!" and his thin and worn-looking young mother let out a scream half delight at finding her child and half terror of this large, gray canine shape that loomed behind him. She snatched up the infant protectively and turned to the large man in uniform. "Officer! Look! That big dreadful thing! It stole my Robby!"

"No," Robby protested firmly. "Nice woof-woof."

The officer laughed. "The lad's probably right, ma'am. It *is* a nice woof-woof. Found your boy wandering around and helped him home. You haven't maybe got a bone for him?"

"Let that big nasty brute into my home? Never! Come on, Robby."

"Want my nice woof-woof."

"I'll woof-woof you, staying out till all hours and giving your father and me the fright of our lives. Just wait till your father sees you, young man; he'll— Oh, good night, officer!" And she shut the door on the yowls of Robby.

The policeman patted Wolf's head. "Never mind about the bone, Rover. She didn't so much as offer me a glass of beer, either. My, you're a husky specimen, aren't you, boy? Look almost like a wolf. Who do you belong to, and what are you doing wandering about alone? Huh?" He turned on his flash and bent over to look at the nonexistent collar.

He straightened up and whistled. "No license. Rover, that's bad. You know what I ought to do? I ought to turn you in. If you weren't a hero that just got cheated out of his bone, I'd— I ought to do it, anyway. Laws are laws, even for heroes. Come on, Rover. We're going for a walk."

Wolf thought quickly. The pound was the last place on earth he wanted to wind up. Even Ozzy would never think of looking for him there. Nobody'd claim him, nobody'd say *Absarka!* and in the end a dose of chloroform— He wrenched loose from the officer's grasp on his hair, and with one prodigious leap cleared the yard, landed on the sidewalk, and started up the street. But the instant he was out of the officer's sight he stopped dead and slipped behind a hedge.

He scented the policeman's approach even before he heard it. The man was running with the lumbering haste of two hundred pounds. But opposite the hedge he, too, stopped. For a moment Wolf wondered if his ruse had failed; but the officer had paused only to scratch his head and mutter, "Say! There's something screwy here. *Who rang that doorbell?* The kid couldn't reach it, and the dog— Oh, well," he concluded. "Nuts," and seemed to find in that monosyllabic summation the solution to all his problems.

As his footsteps and smell died away, Wolf became aware of another scent. He had only just identified it as cat when someone said, "You're were, aren't you?"

Wolf started up, lips drawn back and muscles tense. There was nothing human in sight, but someone had spoken to him. Unthinkingly, he tried to say "Where are you?" but all that came out was a growl.

"Right behind you. Here in the shadows. You can scent me, can't you?"

"But you're a cat," Wolf thought in his snarls. "And you're talking."

"Of course. But I'm not talking human language. It's just your brain that takes it that way. If you had your human body, you'd just think I was going *meowrr*. But you are were, aren't you?"

"How do you . . . why do you think so?"

"Because you didn't try to jump me, as any normal dog would have. And besides, unless Confucius taught me all wrong, you're a wolf, not a dog; and we don't have wolves around here unless they're were."

"How do you know all this? Are you—"

"Oh, no. I'm just a cat. But I used to live next door to a werechow named Confucius. He taught me things."

Wolf was amazed. "You mean he was a man who changed to chow and stayed that way? Lived as a pet?"

"Certainly. This was back at the worst of the depression. He said a dog was more apt to be fed and looked after than a man. I thought it was a smart idea."

"But how terrible! Could a man so debase himself as—"

"Men don't debase themselves. They debase each other. That's the way of most weres. Some change to keep from being debased, others to do a little more effective debasing. Which are you?"

"Why, you see, I—"

"*Sh!* Look. This is going to be fun. Holdup."

Wolf peered around the hedge. A well-dressed, middle-aged man was walking along briskly, apparently enjoying a night constitutional. Behind him moved a thin, silent figure. Even as Wolf watched, the figure caught up with him and whispered harshly, "Up with 'em, buddy!"

The quiet pomposity of the stroller melted away. He was ashen and aspen, as the figure slipped a hand around into his breast pocket and removed an impressive wallet.

And what, thought Wolf, was the good of his fine, vigorous body if it merely crouched behind hedges as a spectator? In one fine bound, to the shocked amazement of the were-wise cat, he had crossed the hedge and landed with his forepaws full in the figure's face. It went over backward with him on top and then there was a loud noise, a flash of light, and a frightful sharp smell. For a moment Wolf felt an acute pang in his shoulder, like the jab of a long needle, and then the pain was gone.

But his momentary recoil had been enough to let the figure get to its feet. "Missed you, huh?" it muttered. "Let's see how you like a slug in the belly, you interfering—" and he applied an epithet which would have been purely literal description if Wolf had not been were.

There were three quick shots in succession even as Wolf sprang. For a second he experienced the most acute stomach-ache of his life. Then he landed again. The figure's head hit the concrete sidewalk and he was still.

Lights were leaping into brightness everywhere. Among all the confused noises, Wolf could hear the shrill complaints of Robby's mother, and among all the compounded smells, he could distinguish scent of the policeman who wanted to impound him. That meant getting out, and quick.

The city meant trouble, Wolf decided as he loped off. He could endure loneliness while he practiced his wolfry, until he had Gloria. Though just as a precaution he must arrange with Ozzy about a plausible-looking collar, and—

The most astounding realization yet suddenly struck him! He had received four bullets, three of them square in the stomach, and he hadn't a wound to show for it! Being a werewolf certainly offered its practical advantages. Think what a criminal could do with such bullet-

proofing. Or— But no. He was a werewolf for fun, and that was that.

But even for a werewolf, being shot, though relatively painless, is tiring. A great deal of nervous energy is absorbed in the magical and instantaneous knitting of those wounds. And when Wolfe Wolf reached the peace and calm of the uncivilized hills, he no longer felt like reveling in freedom. Instead he stretched out to his full length, nuzzled his head down between his forepaws, and slept.

"Now the essence of magic," said Hellophagus of Smyrna, "is deceit; and that deceit is of two kinds. By magic, the magician deceives others; but magic deceives the magician himself."

So far the lycanthropic magic of Wolfe Wolf had worked smoothly and pleasantly, but now it was to show him the second trickery that lurks behind every magic trick. And the first step was that he slept.

He woke in confusion. His dreams had been human —and of Gloria—despite the body in which he dreamed them, and it took several full minutes for him to reconstruct just how he happened to be in that body. For a moment the dream, even that episode in which he and Gloria had been eating blueberry waffles on a roller coaster, seemed more nearly plausible than the reality.

But he readjusted quickly, and glanced up at the sky. The sun looked as though it had been up at least an hour, which meant that the time was somewhere between six and seven. Today was Thursday, which meant that he was saddled with an eight-o'clock class. That left plenty of time to change back, shave, dress, breakfast and resume the normal life of Professor Wolf, which was, after all, important if he intended to support a wife.

He tried, as he trotted through the streets, to look as tame and unwolflike as possible, and apparently succeeded. No one paid him any mind save children, who wanted to play, and dogs, who began by snarling and ended by cowering away terrified. His friend the cat might be curiously tolerant of weres, but not so dogs.

He trotted up the steps of the Berkeley Inn confidently. The clerk was under a slight spell and would not notice wolves. There was nothing to do but rouse Ozzy, be *absorbed*, and—

"Hey! Where you going? Get out of here! Shoo!"

It was the clerk, a stanch and brawny young man, who straddled the stairway and vigorously waved him off.

"No dogs in here! Go on now. Scoot!"

Quite obviously this man was under no spell, and equally obviously there was no way of getting up that staircase short of using a wolf's strength to tear the clerk apart. For a second Wolf hesitated. He had to get changed back. It would be a pity to use his powers to injure another human being—if only he had not slept and arrived before this unmagicked day clerk came on duty—but necessity knows no—

Then the solution hit him. Wolf turned and loped off just as the clerk hurled an ash tray at him. Bullets may be relatively painless, but even a werewolf's rump, he learned promptly, is sensitive to flying glass.

The solution was foolproof. The only trouble was that it meant an hour's wait, and he was hungry. He found himself even displaying a certain shocking interest in the plump occupant of a baby carriage. You do get different appetites with a different body. He could understand how some originally well-intentioned werewolves might in time become monsters. But he was stronger in will, and much smarter. His stomach could hold out until this plan worked.

The janitor had already opened the front door of Wheeler Hall, but the building was deserted. Wolf had no trouble reaching the second floor unnoticed or finding his classroom. He had a little more trouble holding the chalk between his teeth and a slight tendency to gag on the dust; but by balancing his forepaws on the eraser trough, he could manage quite nicely. It took three springs to catch the ring of the chart in his teeth, but once that was pulled down there was nothing to do but crouch under the desk and pray that he would not starve quite to death.

The students of German 31B, as they assembled reluctantly for their eight o'clock, were a little puzzled at being confronted by a chart dealing with the influence of the gold standard on world economy, but they decided simply that the janitor had been forgetful.

The wolf under the desk listened unseen to their gathering murmurs, overheard that cute blonde in the front row make dates with three different men for that same night, and finally decided that enough had assembled to make his chances plausible. He slipped out from under the desk far enough to reach the ring of the chart, tugged at it, and let go.

The chart flew up with a rolling crash. The students broke off their chatter, looked up at the blackboard, and beheld in a huge and shaky scrawl the mysterious letters

A B S A R K A

It worked. With enough people, it was an almost mathematical certainty that one of them in his puzzlement—for the race of subtitle readers, though handicapped by the talkies, still exists—would read the mysterious word aloud. It was the much-bedated blonde who did it.

"Absarka," she said wonderingly.

And there was Professor Wolfe Wolf, beaming cordially at his class.

The only flaw was this: He had forgotten that he was only a werewolf, and not Hyperman. His clothes were still at the Berkeley Inn, and here on the lecture platform he was stark naked.

Two of his best pupils screamed and one fainted. The blonde only giggled appreciatively.

Emily was incredulous but pitying.
Professor Fearing was sympathetic but reserved.
The chairman of the department was cool.
The dean of letters was chilly.

The president of the university was frigid.

Wolfe Wolf was unemployed.

And Heliophagus of Smyrna was right. "The essence of magic is deceit."

"But what can I do?" Wolf moaned into his zombie glass. "I'm stuck. I'm stymied. Gloria arrives in Berkeley tomorrow, and here I am—nothing. Nothing but a futile, worthless werewolf. You can't support a wife on that. You can't raise a family. You can't . . . you can't even propose— I want another. Sure you won't have one?"

Ozymandias the Great shook his round, fringed head. "The last time I took two drinks I started all this. I've got to behave if I want to stop it. But you're an able-bodied, strapping, young man; surely, colleague, you can get work?"

"Where? All I'm trained for is academic work, and this scandal has put the kibosh on that forever. What university is going to hire a man who showed up naked in front of his class without even the excuse of being drunk? And supposing I try something else, I'd have to give references, say something about what I'd been doing with my thirty-odd years. And once these references were checked— Ozzy, I'm a lost man."

"Never despair, colleague. I've learned that magic gets you into some tight squeezes, but there's always a way of getting out. Now take that time in Darjeeling—"

"But what can I do? I'll wind up like Confucius the werechow and live off charity, if you'll find me somebody who wants a pet wolf."

"You know," Ozymandias reflected, "you may have something there, colleague."

"Nuts! That was a gag. I can at least retain my self-respect, even if I go on relief doing it. And I'll bet they don't like naked men on relief, either."

"No. I don't mean just being a pet wolf. But look at it this way: What are your assets? You have only two outstanding abilities. One of them is to teach German, and that is now completely out."

"Check."

"And the other is to change yourself into a wolf. All right, colleague. There must be some commercial possibilities in that. Let's look into them."

"Nonsense."

"Not quite. For every merchandise there's a market. The trick is to find it. And you, colleague, are going to be the first practical commercial werewolf on record."

"I could— They say Ripley's Odditorium pays good money. Supposing I changed six times a day regular for delighted audiences?"

Ozymandias shook his head sorrowfully. "It's no good. People don't want to see real magic. It makes 'em uncomfortable—starts 'em wondering what else might be loose in the world. They've got to feel sure it's all done with mirrors. I know. I had to quit vaudeville because I wasn't smart enough at faking it; all I could do was the real thing."

"I could be a Seeing Eye dog, maybe?"

"They have to be female."

"When I'm changed. I can understand animal language. Maybe I could be a dog trainer and— No, that's out. I forgot; they're scared to death of me."

But Ozymandias' pale-blue eyes had lit up at the suggestion. "Colleague, you're warm. Oh, are you warm! Tell me: Why did you say your fabulous Gloria was coming to Berkeley?"

"Publicity for a talent hunt."

"For what?"

"A dog to star in 'Fangs of the Forest.'"

"And what kind of a dog?"

"A—" Wolf's eyes widened and his jaw sagged. "A wolf dog," he said softly.

And the two men looked at each other with a wild surmise—silent, beside a bar in Berkeley.

"It's all the fault of that Disney dog," the trainer complained. "Pluto does anything. Everything. So our poor mutts are expected to do likewise. Listen to that dope! 'The dog should come into the room, give one paw to the baby, indicate that he recognizes the hero in his Eskimo disguise, go over to the table, find the bone, and clap his paws gleefully!' Now who's got a set of signals to cover stuff like that? Pluto!" he snorted.

Gloria Garton said, "Oh." By that one sound she managed to convey that she sympathized deeply, that the trainer was a nice-looking young man whom she'd just as soon see again, and that no dog star was going to steal "Fangs of the Forest" from her. She adjusted her skirt slightly, leaned back, and made the plain wooden chair on the bare theater stage seem more than ever like a throne.

"All right." The man in the violet beret waved away the last unsuccessful applicant and read from a card: "Dog: Wopsy. Owner: Mrs. Channing Galbraith. Trainer: Luther Newby. Bring it in."

An assistant scurried offstage, and there was a sound of whines and whimpers as a door opened.

"What's got into those dogs today?" the man in the violet beret demanded. "They all seem scared to death and beyond."

"I think," said Fergus O'Breen, "that it's that big, gray wolf dog. Somehow, the others just don't like him."

Gloria Garton lowered her bepurpled lids and cast a queenly stare of suspicion on the young detective. There was nothing wrong with his being there. His sister was head of publicity for Metropolis, and he'd handled several confidential cases for the studio, even one for her, that time her chauffeur had decided to try his hand at blackmail. Fergus O'Breen was a Metropolis fixture; but still it bothered her.

The assistant brought in Mrs. Galbraith's Wopsy. The man in the violet beret took one look and screamed. The scream bounced back from every wall of the theater in the ensuing minute of silence. At last he found words. "A wolf dog! Tookah is the greatest role ever written for a wolf dog! And what do they bring us! A terrier yet! So if we wanted a terrier we could cast Asta!"

"But if you'd only let us show you—" Wopsy's tall, young trainer started to protest.

"Get out!" the man in the violet beret shrieked. "Get out before I lose my temper!"

Wopsy and her trainer slunk off.

"In El Paso," the casting director lamented, "they bring me a Mexican hairless. In St. Louis it's a Pekinese yet! And if I do find a wolf dog, it sits in a corner and waits for somebody to bring in a sled to pull."

"Maybe," said Fergus, "you should try a real wolf."

"Wolf, *schmolf!*" He picked up the next card. "Dog: Yoggoth. Owner and trainer: Mr. O. Z. Manders. Bring it in."

The whining noise offstage ceased as Yoggoth was brought out to be tested. The man in the violet beret hardly glanced at the fringe-bearded owner and trainer. He had eyes only for that splendid gray wolf. "If you can only act—" he prayed, with the same fervor with which many a man has thought, "If you could only cook—"

He pulled the beret to an even more unlikely angle and snapped, "All right, Mr. Manders. The dog should come into the room, give one paw to the baby, indicate that he recognizes the hero in his Eskimo disguise, go over to the table, find the bone, and clap his paws joyfully. Baby here, here, here, table here. Got that?"

Mr. Manders looked at his wolf dog and repeated, "Got that?"

Yoggoth wagged his tail.

"Very well, colleague," said Mr. Manders. "Do it." Yoggoth did it.

The violet beret sailed into the flies, on the wings of its owner's triumphal scream of joy. "He did it!" he kept burbling. "He did it!"

"Of course, colleague," said Mr. Manders calmly.

The trainer who hated Pluto had a face as blank as a vampire's mirror. Fergus O'Breen was speechless with wonderment. Even Gloria Garton permitted surprise and interest to cross her regal mask.

"You mean he can do anything?" gurgled the man who used to have a violet beret.

"Anything," said Mr. Manders.

"Can he— Let's see, in the dance-hall sequence— can he knock a man down, roll him over, and frisk his back pocket?"

Even before Mr. Manders could say "Of course," Yoggoth had demonstrated, using Fergus O'Breen as a convenient dummy.

"Peace!" the casting director sighed. "Peace— Charley!" he yelled to his assistant. "Send 'em all away. No more try-outs. We've found Tookah! It's wonderful."

The trainer stepped up to Mr. Manders. "It's more than that, sir. It's positively superhuman. I'll swear I couldn't detect the slightest signal, and for such complicated operations, too. Tell me, Mr. Manders, what system do you use?"

Mr. Manders made a Moopleish *kaff-kaff* noise. "Professional secret, you understand, young man. I'm planning on opening a school when I retire, but obviously until then—"

"Of course, sir. I understand. But I've never seen anything like it in all my born days."

"I wonder," Fergus O'Breen observed from the floor, "if your marvel dog can get off of people, too?"

Mr. Manders stifled a grin. "Of course! Yoggoth!"

Fergus picked himself up and dusted from his clothes the grime of the stage, which is the most clinging grime on earth. "I'd swear," he muttered, "that beast of yours enjoyed that."

"No hard feelings, I trust, Mr.—"

"O'Breen. None at all. In fact, I'd suggest a little celebration in honor of this great event. I know you can't buy a drink this near the campus, so I brought along a bottle just in case."

"Oh," said Gloria Garton, implying that carousals were ordinarily beneath her, that this, however, was a special occasion, and that possibly there was something to be said for the green-eyed detective, after all.

This was all too easy, Wolfe Wolf-Yoggoth kept thinking. There was a catch to it somewhere. This was certainly the ideal solution to the problem of how to earn money as a werewolf. Bring an understanding of human speech and instructions into a fine animal body, and you are the answer to a director's prayer. It was perfect as long as it lasted; and if "Fangs of the Forest" was a smash hit, there were bound to be other Yoggoth pictures. Look at Rin-tin-tin. But it was too easy—

His ears caught a familiar "Oh" and his attention reverted to Gloria. This "Oh" had meant that she really shouldn't have another drink, but since liquor didn't affect her any way and this was a special occasion, she might as well.

She was even more beautiful than he had remembered. Her golden hair was shoulder-length now, and flowed with such rippling perfection that it was all he could do to keep from reaching out a paw to it. Her body had ripened, too, was even more warm and promising than his memories of her. And in his new shape he found her greatest charm in something he had not been able to appreciate fully as a human being, the deep, heady scent of her flesh.

"To 'Fangs of the Forest'!" Fergus O'Breen was toasting. "And may that pretty-boy hero of yours get a worse mauling than I did."

Wolf-Yoggoth grinned to himself. That had been fun. That'd teach the detective to go crawling around hotel rooms.

"And while we're celebrating, colleagues," said Oxymandias the Great, "why should we neglect our star? Here, Yoggoth." And he held out the bottle.

"He drinks yet!" the casting director exclaimed delightedly.

"Sure. He was weaned on it."

Wolf took a sizable gulp. It felt good. Warm and rich—almost the way Gloria smelled.

"But how about you, Mr. Manders?" the detective insisted for the fifth time. "It's your celebration really.

The poor beast won't get the four-figure checks from Metropolis. And you've taken only one drink."

"Never take two, colleague. I know my danger point. Two drinks in me and things start happening."

"More should happen yet than training miracle dogs! Go on, O'Breen. Make him drink. We should see what happens."

Fergus took another long drink himself. "Go on. There's another bottle in the car, and I've gone far enough to be resolved not to leave here sober. And I don't want sober companions, either." His green eyes were already beginning to glow with a new wildness.

"No, thank you, colleague."

Gloria Garton left her throne, walked over to the plump man, and stood close, her soft hand resting on his arm. "Oh," she said, implying that dogs were dogs, but still that the party was inevitably in her honor and his refusal to drink was a personal insult.

Ozymandias the Great looked at Gloria, sighed, shrugged, resigned himself to fate, and drank.

"Have you trained many dogs?" the casting director asked.

"Sorry, colleague. This is my first."

"All the more wonderful! But what's your profession otherwise?"

"Well, you see, I'm a magician."

"Oh," said Gloria Garton, implying delight, and went so far as to add, "I have a friend who does black magic."

"I'm afraid, ma'am, mine's simply white. That's tricky enough. With the black you're in for some real dangers."

"Hold on!" Fergus interposed. "You mean really a magician? Not just presti . . . sleight of hand?"

"Of course, colleague."

"Good theater," said the casting director. "Never let 'em see the mirrors."

"Uh-huh," Fergus nodded. "But look, Mr. Manders. What can you do, for instance?"

"Well, I can change—"

Yoggoth barked loudly.

"Oh, no," Ozymandias covered hastily, "that's really a little beyond me. But I can—"

"Can you do the Indian rope trick?" Gloria asked languidly. "My friend says that's terribly hard."

"Hard? Why, ma'am, there's nothing to it. I can remember that time in Darjeeling—"

Fergus took another long drink. "I," he announced defiantly, "want to see the Indian rope trick. I have met people who've met people who've met people who've seen it, but that's as close as I ever get. And I don't believe it."

"But, colleague, it's so simple."

"I don't believe it."

Ozymandias the Great drew himself up to his full lack of height. "Colleague, you are about to see it!" Yoggoth tugged warningly at his coat tails. "Leave me alone, Wolf. An aspersion has been cast!"

Fergus returned from the wings dragging a coiled length of rope. "This do?"

"Admirably."

"What goes?" the casting director demanded.

"*Shh!*" said Gloria. "Oh—"

She beamed worshipfully on Ozymandias, whose chest swelled to the point of threatening the security of his buttons. "Ladies and gentlemen!" he announced, in the manner of one prepared to fill a vast amphitheater with his voice. "You are about to behold Ozymandias the Great in—The Indian Rope Trick! Of course," he added conversationally, "I haven't got a small boy to chop into mincemeat, unless perhaps one of you— No? Well, we'll try it without. Not quite so impressive, though. And will you stop yapping, Wolf?"

"I thought his name was Yogi," said Fergus.

"Yoggoth. But since he's part wolf on his mother's side— Now quiet, all of you!"

He had been coiling the rope as he spoke. Now he placed the coil in the center of the stage, where it lurked like a threatening rattler. He stood beside it and deftly, professionally, went through a series of passes and mumblings so rapidly that even the superhumanly sharp eyes and ears of Wolf-Yoggoth could not follow them.

The end of the rope detached itself from the coil, reared in the air, turned for a moment like a head uncertain where to strike, then shot straight up until all the rope was uncoiled. The lower end rested a good inch above the stage.

Gloria gasped. The casting director drank hurriedly. Fergus, for some reason, stared curiously at the wolf.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen—oh, hang it, I do wish I had a boy to carve—Ozymandias the Great will ascend this rope into that land which only the users of the rope may know. Onward and upward! Be right back," he added reassuringly to Wolf.

His plump hands grasped the rope above his head and gave a little jerk. His knees swung up and clasped about the hempen pillar. And up he went, like a monkey on a stick, up and up and up—

—until suddenly he was gone.

Just gone. That was all there was to it. Gloria was beyond even saying "Oh." The casting director sat his beautiful flannels down on the filthy floor and gaped. Fergus swore softly and melodiously. And Wolf felt a premonitory prickling in his spine.

The stage door opened, admitting two men in denim pants and work shirts. "Hey!" said the first. "Where do you think you are?"

"We're from Metropolis Pictures," the casting director started to explain, scrambling to his feet.

"I don't care if you're from Washington, we gotta clear this stage. There's movies here tonight. Come on, Joe, help me get 'em out. And that pooch, too."

"You can't, Fred," said Joe reverently, and pointed. His voice sank to an awed whisper. "That's Gloria Garton—"

"So it is. Hi, Miss Garton, wasn't that last one of yours a stinkeroo!"

"Your public, darling," Fergus murmured.

"Come on!" Fred shouted. "Out of here. We gotta clean up. And you, Joe! Strike that rope!"

Before Fergus could move, before Wolf could leap to the rescue, the efficient stage hand had struck the rope and was coiling it up.

Wolf stared up into the flies. There was nothing up there. Nothing at all. Some place beyond the end of that rope was the only man on earth he could trust to say *Absorka!* for him; and the way down was cut off forever.

Wolfe Wolf sprawled on the floor of Gloria Garton's boudoir and watched that vision of volupty change into her most fetching negligee.

The situation was perfect. It was the fulfillment of all his dearest dreams. The only flaw was that he was still in a wolf's body.

Gloria turned, leaned over, and chucked him under the snout. "Wuzzum a cute wolf dog, wuzzum?"

Wolf could not restrain a snarl.

"Doesn't um like Gloria to talk baby talk? Um was a naughty wolf, yes, um was."

It was torture. Here you are in your best beloved's hotel room, all her beauty revealed to your hungry eyes, and she talks baby talk to you! Wolf had been happy at first when Gloria suggested that she might take over the care of her co-star pending the reappearance of his trainer—for none of them was quite willing to admit that "Mr. O. Z. Manders" might truly and definitely have vanished—but he was beginning to realize that the situation might bring on more torment than pleasure.

"Wolves are funny," Gloria observed. She was more

talkative when alone, with no need to be cryptically fascinating. "I knew a Wolf once, only that was his name. He was a man. And he was a funny one."

Wolf felt his heart beating fast under his gray fur. To hear his own name on Gloria's warm lips— But before she could go on to tell her pet how funny Wolf was, her maid rapped on the door.

"A Mr. O'Breen to see you, madam."

"Tell him to go 'way."

"He says it's important, and he does look, madam, as though he might make trouble."

"Oh, all right." Gloria rose and wrapped her negligee more respectably about her. "Come on, Yog— No, that's a silly name. I'm going to call you Wolfie. That's cute. Come on, Wolfie, and protect me from the big, bad detective."

Fergus O'Breen was pacing the sitting room with a certain vicious deliberateness in his strides. He broke off and stood still as Gloria and the wolf entered.

"So?" he observed tersely. "Reinforcements?"

"Will I need them?" Gloria cooed.

"Look, light of my love life." The glint in the green eyes was cold and deadly. "You've been playing games, and whatever their nature, there's one thing they're not. And that's cricket."

Gloria gave him her slow, lanquid smile. amusing, Fergus."

"Thanks. I doubt, however, if your activities a[re]..."

"You're still a little boy playing cops and [rob]bers. And what boogyman are you after now?"

"Ha-ha," said Fergus politely. "And you know the answer to that question better than I do. That's why I'm here."

Wolf was puzzled. This conversation meant nothing to him. And yet he sensed a tension of danger in the air as clearly as though he could smell it.

"Go on," Gloria snapped impatiently. "And remember how dearly Metropolis Pictures will thank you for annoying one of its best box-office attractions."

"Some things, my sweet, are more important than pictures, though you mightn't think it where you come from. One of them is a certain federation of forty-eight units. Another is an abstract concept called democracy."

"And so?"

"And so I want to ask you one question: Why did you come to Berkeley?"

"For publicity on 'Fangs,' of course. It was your sister's idea."

"You've gone temperamental and turned down better ones. Why leap at this?

"You don't haunt publicity stunts yourself, Fergus. Why are you here?"

Fergus was pacing again. "And why was your first act in Berkeley a visit to the office of the German department?"

"Isn't that natural enough? I used to be a student here."

"Majoring in dramatics, and you didn't go near the Little Theater. Why the German department?" He

paused and stood straight in front of her, fixing her with his green gaze.

Gloria assumed the attitude of a captured queen defying the barbarian conqueror. "Very well. If you must know—I went to the German department to see the man I love."

Wolf held his breath, and tried to keep his tail from thrashing.

"Yes," she went on impassionedly, "you strip the last veil from me, and force me to confess to you what he alone should have heard first. This man proposed to me by mail. I foolishly rejected his proposal. But I thought and thought—and at last I knew. When I came to Berkeley I had to see him—"

"And did you?"

"The little mouse of a secretary told me he wasn't there. But I shall see him yet. And when I do—"

Fergus bowed stiffly. "My congratulations to you both, my sweet. And the name of this more than fortunate gentleman?"

"Professor Wolfe Wolf."

"Who is doubtless the individual referred to in this?" He whipped a piece of paper from his sport coat and thrust it at Gloria. She paled and was silent. But Wolfe Wolf did not wait for her reply. He did not care. He knew the solution to his problem now, and he was streaking unobserved for her boudoir.

Gloria Garton entered the boudoir a minute later, a shaken and wretched woman. She unstoppered one of the delicate perfume bottles on her dresser and poured herself a stiff drink of whiskey. Then her eyebrows lifted in surprise as she stared at her mirror. Scrawlingly lettered across the glass in her own deep-crimson lipstick was the mysterious word

A B S A R K A

Frowning, she said it aloud. *"Absarka—"*

From behind a screen stepped Professor Wolfe Wolf, incongruously wrapped in one of Gloria's lushest dressing robes. "Gloria dearest—" he cried.

"Wolf!" she exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here in my room?"

"I love you. I've always loved you since you couldn't tell a strong from a weak verb. And now that I know that you love me—"

"This is terrible. Please get out of here!"

"Gloria—"

"Get out of here, or I'll sick my dog on you. Wolfie—Here, nice Wolfie!"

"I'm sorry, Gloria. But Wolfie won't answer you."

"Oh, you beast! Have you hurt Wolfie? Have you—"

"I wouldn't touch a hair on his pelt. Because, you see, Gloria darling, I am Wolfie."

"What on earth do you—" Gloria stared around the room. It was undeniable that there was no trace of the presence of a wolf dog. And here was a man dressed only in one of her robes and no sign of his own clothes. And after that funny little man and the rope—

"You thought I was drab and dull," Wolf went on. "You thought I'd sunk into an academic rut. You'd sooner have an actor or a G-man. But I, Gloria, am something more exciting than you've ever dreamed of. There's not another soul on earth I'd tell this to; but I, Gloria, am a werewolf."

Gloria gasped. "That isn't possible! But it all fits in. What I heard about you on campus, and your friend with the funny beard and how he vanished, and, of course, it explains how you did tricks that any real dog couldn't possibly do—"

"Don't you believe me, darling?"

Gloria rose from the dresser chair and went into his arms. "I believe you, dear. And it's wonderful! I'll bet there's not another woman in all Hollywood that was ever married to a werewolf!"

"Then you will—"

"But of course, dear. We can work it out beautifully. We'll hire a stooge to be your trainer on the lot. You can work daytimes, and come home at night and I'll say *Absarka!* for you. It'll be perfect."

"Gloria—" Wolf murmured with tender reverence.

"One thing, dear. Just a little thing. Would you do Gloria a favor?"

"Anything!"

"Show me how you change. Change for me now. Then I'll *Absarka* you back right away."

Wolf said The Word. He was in such ecstatic bliss that he hardly felt the pang this time. He capered about the room with all the litheness of his fine wolfish legs, and ended up before Gloria, wagging his tail and looking for approval.

Gloria patted his head. "Good boy, Wolfie. And now, darling, you can just stay that way."

Wolf let out a yelp of amazement.

"You heard me, Wolfie. You're staying that way. You didn't happen to believe any of that guff I was feeding the detective, did you? Love you? I should waste my time! But this way you can be very useful to me. With your trainer gone, I can take charge of you and pick up an extra thousand a week or so. I won't mind that. And Professor Wolfe Wolf will have vanished forever, which fits right in with my plans."

Wolf snarled.

"Now don't try to get nasty, Wolfie darling. Um wouldn't threaten ums darling Gloria, would ums? Remember what I can do for you. I'm the only person who can turn you into a man again. You wouldn't dare teach anyone else that. You wouldn't dare let people know what you really are. An ignorant person would kill you. A smart one would have you locked up as a lunatic."

Wolf still advanced threateningly.

"Oh, no. You can't hurt me. Because all I'd have to do would be to say the word on the mirror. Then you wouldn't be a dangerous wolf any more. You'd just be a man here in my room, and I'd scream. And after what happened on the campus yesterday, how long do you think you'd stay out of the madhouse?"

Wolf backed away and let his tail droop.

"You see, Wolfie darling? Gloria has ums just where she wants ums. And ums is going to be a good boy."

There was a rap on the boudoir door, and Gloria called, "Come in."

"A gentleman to see you, madam," the maid announced. "A Professor Fearing."

Gloria smiled her best cruel and queenly smile. "Come along, Wolfie. This may interest you."

Professor Oscar Fearing, overflowing one of the graceful chairs of the sitting room, beamed benevolently as Gloria and the wolf entered. "Ah, my dear! A new pet. Touching."

"And what a pet, Oscar. Wait till you hear."

Professor Fearing buffed his pince-nez against his sleeve. "And wait, my dear, until you hear all that I have learned. Chiswick has perfected his protective screen against magnetic bombs, and the official trial is set for next week. And Farnsworth has all but completed his researches on a new process for obtaining osmium. Gas warfare may start any day, and the power that can command a plentiful supply of—"

"Fine, Oscar," Gloria broke in. "But we can go over all this later. We've got other worries right now."

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"Have you run onto a red-headed young Irishman in a yellow shirt?"

"No, I— Why, yes. I did see such an individual leaving the office yesterday. I believe he had been to see Wolf."

"He's on to us. He's a detective from Los Angeles, and he's tracking us down. Some place he got hold of a scrap of record that should have been destroyed. He knows I'm in it, and he knows I'm tied up with somebody here in the German department."

Professor Fearing scrutinized his pince-nez, approved of their cleanness, and set them on his nose. "Not so much excitment, my dear. No hysteria. Let us approach this calmly. Does he know about the Temple of the Dark Truth?"

"Not yet. Nor about you. He just knows it's somebody in the department."

"Then what could be simpler? You have heard of the strange conduct of Wolfe Wolf?"

"Have I?" Gloria laughed harshly.

"Everyone knows of Wolf's infatuation with you. Throw the blame onto him. It should be easy to clear yourself and make you appear an innocent tool. Direct all attention to him and the organization will be safe. The Temple of the Dark Truth can go its mystic way and extract even more invaluable information from weary scientists who need the emotional release of a false religion."

"That's what I've tried to do. I gave O'Breen a long song and dance about my devotion to Wolf, so obviously phony he'd be bound to think it was a cover-up for something else. And I think he bit. But the situation is trickier than you guess. Do you know where Wolfe Wolf is?"

"No one knows. After the president . . . ah . . . rebuked him, he seems to have vanished."

Gloria laughed again. "He's right here. In this room."

"My dear! Secret panels and such? You take your espionage too seriously. Where?"

"There!"

Professor Fearing gaped. "Are you serious?"

"As serious as you are about the future of Fascism. That is Wolfe Wolf."

Fearing approached the wolf incredulously and extended his hand.

"He might bite," Gloria warned him a second too late.

Fearing stared at his bleeding hand. "That, at least," he observed, "is undeniably true." And he raised his foot to deliver a sharp kick.

"No, Oscar! Don't! Leave him alone. And you'll have to take my word for it—it's way too complicated. But the wolf is Wolfe Wolf, and I've got him completely under control. He's absolutely in our hands. We'll switch suspicion to him, and I'll keep him this way while Fergus and his friends the G-men go off hotfoot on his trail."

"My dear!" Fearing ejaculated. "You're mad. You're more hopelessly mad than the devout members of the Temple." He took off his pince-nez and stared again at the wolf. "And yet Tuesday night— Tell me one thing: From whom did you get this . . . this wolf dog?"

"From a funny plump little man with a fringy beard."

Fearing gasped. Obviously he remembered the furor in the Temple, and the wolf and the fringe-beard. "Very well, my dear. I believe you. Don't ask me why, but I believe you. And now—"

"Now it's all set, isn't it? We keep him here helpless, and we use him to—"

"The wolf as scapegoat. Yes. Very pretty."

"Oh! One thing—" She was suddenly frightened.

Wolfe Wolf was considering the possibilities of a sudden attack on Fearing. He could probably get out of the room before Gloria could say *Absarka!* But after that? Whom could he trust to restore him? Especially if G-men were to be set on his trail—

"What is it?" Fearing asked

"That secretary. That little mouse in the department office. She knows it was you I asked for, not Wolf. Fergus can't have talked to her yet, because he swallowed my story; but he will. He's thorough."

"Hm-m-m. Then, in that case—"

"Yes, Oscar?"

"She must be attended to." Professor Oscar Fearing beamed genially and reached for the phone.

Wolf acted instantly, on inspiration and impulse. His teeth were strong, quite strong enough to jerk the phone cord from the wall. That took only a second, and in the next second he was out of the room and into the hall before Gloria could open her mouth to speak that word that would convert him from a powerful and dangerous wolf to a futile man.

There were shrill screams and a shout or two of "Mad dog!" as he dashed through the lobby, but he paid no heed to them. The main thing was to reach Emily's house before she could be "attended to." Her evidence was essential. That could swing the balance, show Fergus and his G-men where the true guilt lay. And, besides, he admitted to himself, Emily was a nice kid—

His rate of collision was about one point six six per block, and the curses heaped upon him, if theologically valid, would have been more than enough to damn him forever. But he was making time, and that was all that counted. He dashed through traffic signals, cut into the path of trucks, swerved from under street cars, and once even leaped over a stalled car which obstructed him. Everything was going fine, he was halfway there, when two hundred pounds of human flesh landed on him in a flying tackle.

He looked up through the brilliant lighting effects of smashing his head on the sidewalk and saw his old Nemesis, the policeman who had been cheated of his beer.

"So Rover!" said that officer. "Got you at last, did I? Now we'll see if you'll wear a proper license tag. Didn't know I used to play football, did you?"

The officer's grip on his hair was painfully tight. A gleeful crowd was gathering and heckling the policeman with fantastic advice.

"Get along, boys," he admonished. "This is a private matter between me and Rover here. Come on," and he tugged even harder.

Wolf left a large tuft of fur and skin in the officer's grasp and felt the blood ooze out of the bare patch on his neck. He heard an oath and a pistol shot simultaneously, and felt the needlelike sting drive through his shoulder. The awestruck crowd thawed before him. Two more bullets hied after him, but he was gone, leaving the most dazed policeman in Berkeley.

"I hit him," the officer kept muttering blankly. "I hit the—"

Wolfe Wolf coursed along Dwight Way. Two more blocks and he'd be at the little bungalow that Emily shared with a teaching assistant in something or other. That telephone gag had stopped Fearing only momentarily; the orders would have been given by now, the henchmen would be on their way. But he was almost there—

"He'o!" a child's light voice called to him. "Nice woof-woof came back!"

Across the street was the modest frame dwelling of Robby and his shrewish mother. The child had been playing on the sidewalk. Now he saw his idol and deliverer and started across the street at a lurching toddle. "Nice woof-woof!" he kept calling. "Wait for Robby!"

Wolf kept on. This was no time for playing games with even the most delightful of cubs. And then he saw the car. It was an ancient jellopy, plastered with wisecracks even older than itself; and the high-school youth driving was obviously showing his girl friend how it could make time on this deserted residential street. The girl was a cute dish, and who could be bothered watching out for children?

Robby was directly in front of the car. Wolf leaped straight as a bullet. His trajectory carried him so close to the car that he could feel the heat of the radiator on his flank. His forepaws struck Robby and thrust him out of danger. They fell to the ground together, just as the car ground over the last of Wolf's caudal vertebrae.

The cute dish screamed. "Homer! Did we hit them?"

Homer said nothing, and the jellopy zoomed on.

Robby's screams were louder. "You hurt me! You hurt me! *Baaaaad* woof-woof!"

His mother appeared on the porch and joined in with her own howls of rage. The cacophony was terrific. Wolf let out one wailing yelp of his own, to make it perfect and to lament his crushed tail, and dashed on. This was no time to clear up misunderstandings.

But the two delays had been enough. Robby and the policeman had proved the perfect unwitting tools of Oscar Fearing. As Wolf approached Emily's little bungalow, he saw a gray sedan drive off. In the rear was a small, slim girl, and she was struggling.

Even a werewolf's lithe speed cannot equal a motor car. After a block of pursuit, Wolf gave up and sat back in his haunches panting. It felt funny, he thought even in that tense moment, not to be able to sweat, to have to open your mouth and stick out your tongue and—

"Trouble?" inquired a solicitous voice.

This time Wolf recognized the cat. "Heavens, yes," he assented wholeheartedly. "More than you ever dreamed of."

"Food shortage?" the cat asked. "But that toddler back there is nice and plump."

"Shut up," Wolf snarled.

"Sorry; I was just judging from what Confucius told me about werewolves. You don't mean to tell me that you're an altruistic were?"

"I guess I am. I know werewolves are supposed to go around slaughtering, but right now I've got to save a life."

"You expect me to believe that?"

"It's the truth."

"Ah," the cat reflected philosophically. "Truth is a dark and deceitful thing."

Wolfe Wolf was on his feet. "Thanks," he barked. "You've done it."

"Done what?"

"See you later." And Wolf was off at top speed for the Temple of the Dark Truth.

That was the best chance. That was Fearing's headquarters. The odds were at least even that when it wasn't being used for services it was the hang-out of his ring, especially since the consulate had been closed in San Francisco. Again the wild running and leaping, the narrow escapes; and where Wolf had not taken these too seriously before, he knew now that he might be immune to bullets, but certainly not to being run over. His tail still stung and ached tormentingly. But he had to

get there. He had to clear his own reputation, he kept reminding himself; but what he really thought was, *I have to save Emily.*

A block from the Temple he heard the crackle of gunfire. Pistol shots and, he'd swear, machine guns, too. He couldn't figure what it meant, but he pressed on. Then a bright-yellow roadster passed him and a vivid flash came from its window. Instinctively he ducked. You might be immune to bullets, but you still didn't just stand still for them.

The roadster was gone and he was about to follow when a glint of bright metal caught his eye. The bullet which had missed him had hit a brick wall and ricocheted back onto the sidewalk. It glittered there in front of him—pure silver.

This, he realized abruptly, meant the end of his immunity. Fearing had believed Gloria's story, and with his smattering of occult lore he had known the successful counter weapon. A bullet, from now on, might mean no more needle sting, but instant death.

And so Wolfe Wolf went straight on.

He approached the Temple cautiously, lurking behind shrubbery. And he was not the only lurker. Before the Temple, crouching in the shelter of a car every window of which was shattered, were Fergus O'Breen and a moonfaced giant. Each held an automatic, and they were taking pot shots at the steeple.

Wolf's keen, lupine hearing could catch their words even above the firing. "Gabe's around back," Moonface was explaining. "But it's no use. Know what that steeple is? It's a revolving machine-gun turret. They've been ready for something like this. Only two men in there, far as we can tell, but that turret covers all the approaches."

"Only two?" Fergus muttered.

"And the girl. They brought a girl here with them. If she's still alive."

Fergus took careful aim at the steeple, fired, and ducked back behind the car as a bullet missed him by millimeters. "Missed him again! By all the kings that ever ruled Tara, Moon, there's got to be a way in there. How about tear gas?"

Moon snorted. "Think you can reach the firing gap in that armored turret at this angle?"

"That girl—" said Fergus.

Wolf waited no longer. As he sprang forward, the gunner noticed him and shifted his fire. It was like a needle shower in which all the spray is solid steel. Wolf's nerves ached with the pain of reknitting. But at least machine guns apparently didn't fire silver.

The front door was locked, but the force of his drive carried him through and added a throbbing ache in his shoulder to his other discomforts. The lower-floor guard, a pasty-faced individual with a jutting Adam's apple, sprang up, pistol in hand. Behind him, in the midst of the litter of the cult, ceremonial robes, incense burners, curious books, even a Ouija board, lay Emily.

Pasty-face fired. The bullets struck Wolf full in the chest and for an instant he expected death. But this, too, was lead, and he jumped forward. It was not his usual powerful leap. His strength was almost spent by now. He needed to lie on cool earth and let his nerves knit. And this spring was only enough to grapple with his foe, not to throw him.

The man reversed his useless automatic and brought its butt thudding down on the beast's skull. Wolf reeled back, lost his balance, and fell to the floor. For a moment he could not rise. The temptation was so strong just to lie there and—

The girl moved. Her bound hands grasped a corner of the Ouija board. Somehow, she stumbled to her rope-tied feet and raised her arms. Just as Pasty-face rushed for the prostrate wolf, she brought the heavy board down.

Wolf was on his feet now. There was an instant of temptation. His eyes fixed themselves to the jut of that Adam's apple, and his long tongue licked his jowls. Then he heard the machine-gun fire from the turret, and tore himself from Pasty-face's unconscious form.

Ladders are hard on a wolf, almost impossible. But if you use your jaws to grasp the rung above you and pull up, it can be done. He was halfway up the ladder when the gunner heard him. The firing stopped, and Wolf heard a rich German oath in what he automatically recognized as an East Prussian dialect with possible Lithuanian influences. Then he saw the man himself, a broken-nosed blond, staring down the ladder well.

The other man's bullets had been lead. So this must be the one with the silver. But it was too late to turn back now. Wolf bit the next rung and hauled up as the bullet struck his snout and stung through. The blond's eyes widened as he fired again and Wolf climbed another round. After the third shot he withdrew precipitately from the opening.

Shots still sounded from below, but the gunner did not return them. He stood frozen against the wall of the turret watching in horror as the wolf emerged from the well. Wolf halted and tried to get his breath. He was dead with fatigue and stress, but this man must be vanquished.

The blond raised his pistol, sighted carefully, and fired once more. He stood for one terrible instant, gazing at this deathless wolf and knowing from his grandmother's stories what it must be. Then deliberately he clamped his teeth on the muzzle of the automatic and fired again.

Wolf had not yet eaten in his wolf's body, but food must have been transferred from the human stomach to the lupine. There was at least enough for him to be extensively sick.

Getting down the ladder was impossible. He jumped. He had never heard anything about a wolf's landing on his feet, but it seemed to work. He dragged his weary and bruised body along to where Emily sat by the still unconscious Pasty-face, his discarded pistol in her hand. She wavered as the wolf approached her, as though uncertain yet as to whether he was friend or foe.

Time was short. With the machine gun dead, Fergus and his companions would be invading the Temple at any minute. Wolf hurriedly nosed about and found the planchette of the Ouija board. He pushed the heart-

shaped bit of wood onto the board and began to shove it around with his paw.

Emily watched, intent and puzzled. "A," she said aloud. "B—S—"

Wolf finished the word and edged around so that he stood directly beside one of the ceremonial robes. "Are you trying to say something?" Emily frowned.

Wolf wagged his tail in vehement affirmation and began again.

"A—" Emily repeated. "B—S—A—R—"

He could already hear approaching footsteps.

"—K—A— What on earth does that mean? *Absarka—*"

Ex-professor Wolfe Wolf hastily wrapped his naked human body in the cloak of the Dark Truth. Before either he or Emily knew quite what was happening, he had folded her in his arms, kissed her in a most thorough expression of gratitude, and fainted.

Even Wolf's human nose could tell, when he awakened, that he was in a hospital. His body was still limp and exhausted. The bare patch on his neck, where the policeman had pulled out the hair, still stung, and there was a lump where the butt of the automatic had connected. His tail, or where his tail had been, sent twinges through him if he moved. But the sheets were cool and he was at rest and Emily was safe.

"I don't know how you got in there, Mr. Wolf, or what you did; but I want you to know you've done your country a signal service." It was the moonfaced giant speaking.

Fergus O'Breen was sitting beside the bed, too. "Congratulations, Wolf. And I don't know if the doctor would approve, but here."

Wolfe Wolf drank the whiskey gratefully and looked a question at the huge man.

"This is Moon Lafferty," said Fergus. "F. B. I. man. He's been helping me track down this ring of spies ever since I first got wind of them."

"You got them—all?" Wolf asked.

"Picked up Fearing and Garton at the hotel," Lafferty rumbled.

"But how— I thought—"

"You thought we were out for you?" Fergus answered. "That was Garton's idea, but I didn't quite tumble. You see, I'd already talked to your secretary. I knew it was Fearing she'd wanted to see. And when I asked around about Fearing, and learned of the Temple and the defense researches of some of its members, the whole picture cleared up."

"Wonderful work, Mr. Wolf," said Lafferty. "Any time we can do anything for you— And how you got into that machine-gun turret— Well, O'Breen, I'll see you later. Got to check up on the rest of this roundup. Pleasant convalescence to you, Wolf."

Fergus waited until the G-man had left the room. Then he leaned over the bed and asked confidentially, "How about it, Wolf? Going back to your acting career?"

Wolf gasped. "What acting career?"

"Still going to play Tookah? If Metropolis makes 'Fangs' with Miss Garton in a Federal prison."

Wolf fumbled for words. "What sort of nonsense—"

"Come on, Wolf. It's pretty clear I know that much. Might as well tell me the whole story."

Still dazed, Wolf told it. "But how did you know it?" he concluded.

Fergus grinned. "Look. Dorothy Sayers said some place that in a detective story the supernatural may be introduced only to be dispelled. Sure, that's swell. Only in real life there come times when it won't be dispelled. And this was one. There was too much. There were your eyebrows and fingers, there were the obviously real magical powers of your friend, there were the tricks which no dog could possibly do without signals, there was the way the other dogs whimpered and cringed— I'm pretty hard-headed, Wolf, but I'm Irish. I'll string along only so far with the materialistic, but too much coincidence is too much."

"Fearing believed it, too," Wolf reflected. "But one thing that worries me—if they used a silver-bullet on me once, why were all the rest of them lead? Why was I safe from then on?"

"Well," said Fergus, "I'll tell you. Because it wasn't 'they' who fired the silver bullet. You see, Wolf, up till the last minute I thought you were on 'their' side. I, somehow, didn't associate good will with a werewolf. So I got a mold from a gunsmith and paid a visit to a jeweler and— I'm glad I missed," he added sincerely.

"You're glad!"

"But look. Previous question stands. Are you going back to acting? Because if not, I've got a suggestion."

"Which is?"

"You say you fretted about how to be practical, commercial werewolf. All right. You're strong and fast. You can terrify people even to committing suicide. You can overhear conversations that no human being could get in on. You're invulnerable to bullets. Can you tell me better qualifications for a G-man?"

Wolf goggled. "Me? A G-man?"

"Moon's been telling me how badly they need new men. They've changed the qualifications lately so that your language knowledge'll do instead of the law or accounting they used to require. And, after what you did today, there won't be any trouble about a little academic scandal in your past. Moon's pretty sold on you."

Wolf was speechless. Only three days ago he had been in torment because he was not an actor or a G-man. Now—

"Think it over," said Fergus.

"I will. Indeed I will. Oh, and one other thing. Has there been any trace of Ozzy?"

"Nary a sign."

"I like that man. I've got to try to find him and—"

"If he's the magician I think he is, he's staying up there only because he decided he likes it."

"I don't know. Magic's tricky. Heaven knows I've learned that. I'm going to do all I can for that fringe-bearded old colleague."

"Wish you luck. Shall I send in your other guest?"

"Who's that?"

"Your secretary. Here on business, no doubt."

Fergus disappeared discreetly as he admitted Emily. She walked over to the bed and took Wolf's hand. His eyes drank in her quiet, charming simplicity, and his mind wondered what freak of belated adolescence had made him succumb to the blatant glamour of Gloria.

They were silent for a long time. Then at once they both said, "How can I thank you? You saved my life."

Wolf laughed. "Let's not argue. Let's say we saved our life."

"You mean that?" Emily asked gravely.

Wolf pressed her hand. "Aren't you tired of being an office wife?"

In the bazaar of Darjeeling, Chulundra Lingasuta stared at his rope in numb amazement. Young Ali had climbed up only five minutes ago, but now as he descended he was a hundred pounds heavier and wore a curious fringe of beard.

THE END.

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THE DAWN OF REASON

BY JAMES H. BEARD

Donald is sick and the fire won't burn,
And Dirk is cringing behind the churn.
A hapless baby, a cold, damp floor,
And a dog that never showed dread before
Why does Dirk tremble behind the churn?
What of a fire that will not burn?

I heard her stick as she tapped the road,
I saw her stoop as she caught the toad.
I could cut such a stick in any hedge,
I could catch such a toad on Deston's ledge.
What harm to a child if she catch a toad,
To fire, or Dirk if she tap the road?

What of a charm and what of a spell?
Are the ways of witches the way of Hell?
A senseless jumble of sticks and bones,
A foolish mumble of sighs and groans—
Why should such nonsense make for Hell?
What good, what bad, in charm or spell?

If I were sure that she meant no ill,
She could sit inside when the wind is chill;
A cup of milk and a bit of bread,
And a rag to cover her poor old head.
It's hard on the old when the wind is chill,
I pity the old when they mean no ill.

If I were sure she caused Don's woe,
I'd feather a shaft and string Hal's bow.
I'd wait near the door till she passed again,
And laugh in her face when she screamed with pain.
If I were sure, I'd bend Hal's bow
And a singing shaft would bring her woe.

Is she really a witch or a lonely hag,
With a crooked stick and a dirty bag,
A crazy woman who does no harm,
Or a child of Hell with her spell and charm?
What does she hide in her dirty bag?
Shall I pity or hate the lonely hag?

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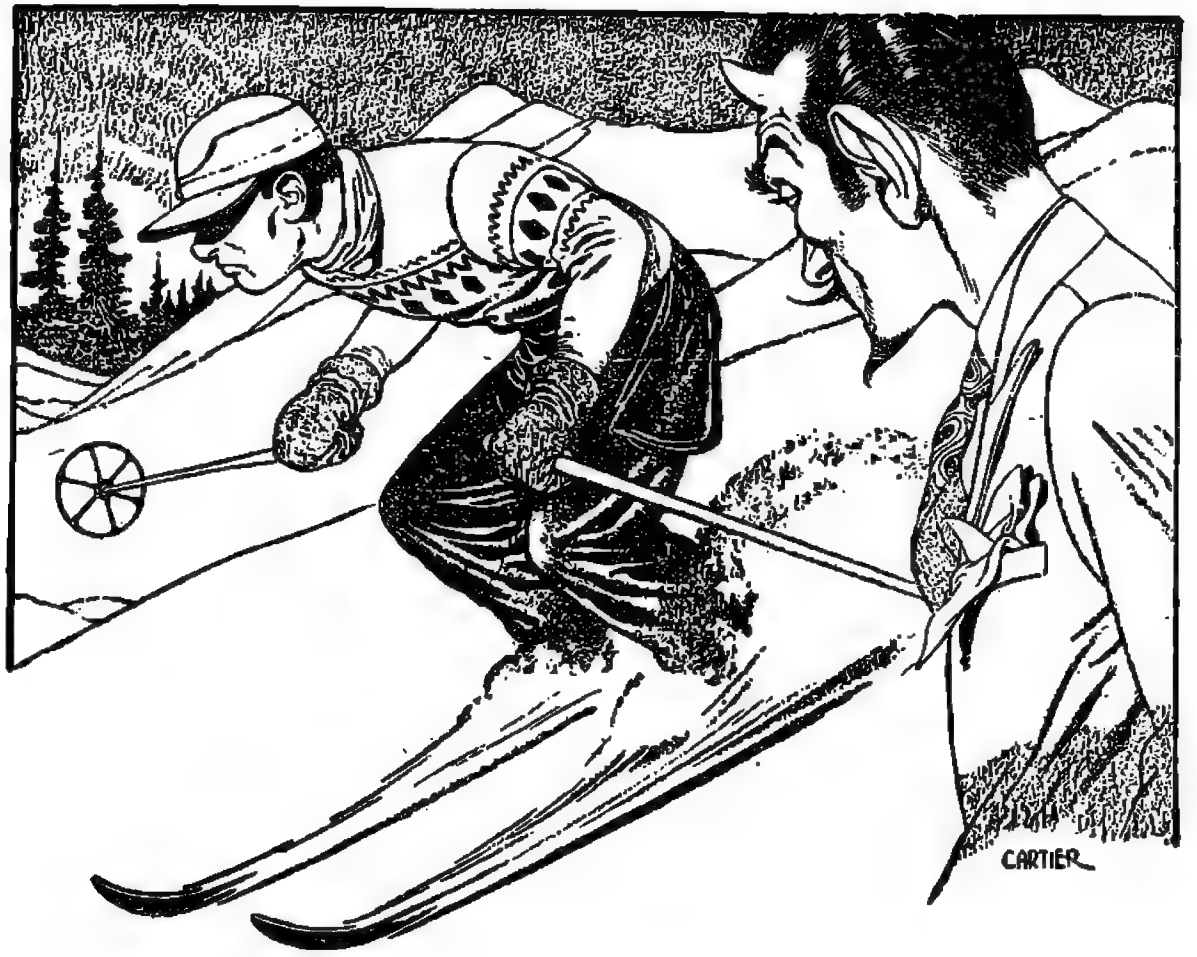

ONE MAN'S HARP

BY BABETTE ROSMOND

A professional gambler will take a chance on anything—even a chance at winning another man's place in Heaven. But it might be that what he won wasn't Heaven—to him.

Harry Jordan put down his magazine and listened politely to the man in the next chair who'd been talking to him on and off for the last hour. The man seemed to be aware of one subject only: skiing. Harry Jordan knew what a ski was, he knew where Sun Valley was—his neighbor's destination—and he knew he hated snow. Outside of that, he knew nothing and cared less. He was bored; it was time to be getting to work on this tanned, tall and patently ingenuous stranger.

"These trains certainly are slow," sighed his neighbor. He yawned extensively. "Wish there was something exciting to do."

"Well," suggested Jordan carefully, "I don't know how much excitement I can promise you with my brand of card playing—never touch the stuff except when I'm driven to it—but, to help pass the time, how about a friendly little game?"

"Well! That sounds fine," said his neighbor with

enthusiasm. "My name's Taft, by the way. Gene Taft. Olympics. Skiing team."

"Oh, yes," said Jordan. "I'm Harry Jordan. Pleased to meet you." His hands were beginning to itch. "Gin rummy O. K.?" he asked. "It's about the only game I know. Two cents a point suit you?"

Taft nodded and showed fine white teeth in a big smile.

"Boy, this is going to be a cinch," he said. "Hate to take your money."

Jordan grinned and rang for the porter, who returned with two new decks. Jordan slid the cards out on the table that the porter rigged up between their seats and picked the jokers out of the decks. Then he shuffled the cards clumsily. They cut for deal, and the high card fell to Jordan. He dealt ten cards to each, picked up his own and expertly separated two aces from the others. As he placed them at one end of his hand he lightly ran his fingernail over a corner of each, cutting a ridge perceptible only to his trained fingertips. He stifled a yawn and settled down to the game. It was such routine stuff that his air of disinterest was completely real.

They played for a half hour. Taft was winning. When he was thirty-five dollars ahead, Jordan had marked the deck to his own satisfaction and good-naturedly proposed that they raise the stakes to five cents a point. In another hour the stakes were raised to twenty-five cents a point. Languidly, Jordan came in for the kill. Taft found himself unable to fill a single sequence. Every card he dropped was picked up by Jordan. The score rose higher and higher and all the scoring was on Jordan's side of the sheet. Finally Jordan added up an astounding column of figures.

"My, my," he said, with a look of amazement that would have registered as pure corn with anyone else but Taft. "I seem to be winning. Imagine. That's forty-seven hundred you owe me."

Taft looked a little pale under his magnificent tan, but his tone was quiet. "That happens to be just four hundred dollars more than I have or could raise. He reached into his pocket and drew out a bank book. "There's forty-three hundred dollars in this account, and it was supposed to keep me until the end of the year. Which means I owe you four hundred I don't have, and that I'm short another four hundred for this"—and here his voice broke a little—"for this skiing trip."

He raised his eyes to Jordan. "Tell you what. I'll cut you for eight hundred dollars, high card takes all. If I win, you'll give me back the four hundred I need and we'll be even on what I owe you. If I lose—"

"Yes," interrupted Jordan, smiling benignly. "If you lose?"

"If I lose," said Taft, evenly, "I'll transfer you—my share of Paradise!"

Jordan stared at Taft. *Out of all the suckers on this train, I have to pick this whack,* he thought. *Paradise he wants to give me. Could I get a liquor license in Paradise, could I get a floor show going there, could I fix deals with The Boys there? Well, I'll be off this train in about ten minutes. I might as well take what I can get. At least the cops won't ever nail me with it.*

"Ha, ha," he said aloud, showing very bad, jagged, little, dirty teeth. "Eight hundred dollars. Against your share of Paradise."

Taft extended his hand toward the stack of cards. He hesitated for a fraction of a second and then pulled out a card. It was the ten of diamonds. He flipped it face up on the table and watched Jordan's hand move toward the deck. Jordan cut the cards. The card facing Taft was the jack of hearts.

Taft looked solemn.

"That's it," he said. "O. K. With all due respects to Those who arrange such affairs, I hereby confer upon you my share of Paradise as of this moment. All the good that was to befall me is now yours."

He had just about finished his sentence when there was a nerve-chilling screech of steel against steel. Jordan rushed to the window. Headed toward them, at a miraculous, terrifying and inevitable speed, was the blinding headlight of another engine. How the tracks had branched Jordan never had time to figure out. In another moment the trains had thundered together and Jordan was smashed with sickening force against the floor of the Pullman car.

Jordan picked himself up from the snow-covered ground and brushed some flakes off his right leg. He felt cold, and more important, he felt lonely—unutterably lonely. He was not at all reassured to find that at the end of his right leg there was a ski. Beyond the ski, his leg seemed to be clothed with a close-fitting silky green trouser tucked into a woolen sock. His foot was covered by a bulky shoe which, in turn, was thrust into the metal and leather strips which bound it to the ski.

He looked around him. He was alone on a vast snow-covered mountain. Stretching down at a thirty-degree angle from where he stood was an icy slope studded with tree stumps and scattered boulders. He tried to find tracks on the thick snow, but couldn't. He realized he must have arrived somewhat unconventionally.

He removed his skis, with difficulty, and trudged up the hill, slipping frequently. Several hundred feet higher he found the trail of skis, which disappeared and then reappeared at the very spot where he had been a few moments before. He saw in his mind the picture of an intrepid skier, hurtling down the mountain—like in the movies—coming to earth on the rim of disaster on a tiny shelf overhanging the valley. A bitter wind chilled him to the core, as he started to climb the hill; then, suddenly he stopped. There was no one else about. It was he who had been standing on the landing marks of the skis.

That intrepid skier, that defier of death, had been himself.

Shivering with fright and cold, he continued his climb. In about half an hour he saw a curl of smoke. His feet, by then, felt as if he had left them off that morning; his ski boots were saturated with icy water. Through the tattered folds of his pants his blue knees poked, lacerated and bleeding from frequent contact with the sharp snow crust.

The smoke was coming from the chimney of a long, low house. Jordan swung open the door without knocking. His heart leaped at the beautiful sight before him. A great fire was crackling in a massive fireplace. Several assorted ski suits, with people in them, were sitting around the fire, drinking hot rum. Jordan staggered to a fine, big leather couch and collapsed.

A servant in a white jacket unlaced Jordan's boots and drew them from his feet, which had returned but were not yet really feet—just clumps of ice. He thrust a mug into Jordan's hand and waited until Jordan had drained it before he spoke:

"My, you're late. We expected you at least an hour ago."

Jordan looked at him. "How did you know I was coming? I'm sure *I* didn't."

The servant looked scornful.

"Now, now, stop with the Here-Comes-Mr.-Jordan stuff. We're all very tired of being whimsied up in the movies. However, you are most welcome here. Everyone respects and admires Gene Taft."

"Taft, Taft?" Jordan rubbed his head. "Where is this? Sun Valley?"

"No, sir. This is Paradise."

And then, of course, Jordan remembered. This was Gene Taft's share of Paradise. This was what he had won in a gin-rummy game.

Jordan looked around him. No one seemed particularly ethereal. Everyone wore old shirts, worn slippers, slacks, jackets and other things which he had known about, dimly, but had never worn. The women were husky but beautiful. Six of them were staring at him, invitingly. Jordan felt better.

One of the women sat next to him. As she bounced reassuringly against him he noticed a trace of perfume. He felt lots better. This was familiar stuff.

"That's nice perfume, sister," he said in his best Humphrey Bogart manner.

The woman smiled and moved closer to him.

"I'm glad you like it," she said. "I've been waiting for you. I've admired you for years. I remember you in the Olympics. My name is Sally Ransome."

Jordan would have liked to continue the conversation, but he felt unreasonably tired. Murmuring excuses, he allowed himself to be led upstairs by the servant. He sank into a bed, and knew nothing until, hours later, a hand tapped his shoulder.

He opened his eyes. He was conscious of pain. Every muscle ached. His face felt like stretched leather; his lips were cracked and bleeding.

The white-coated servant was standing at his bedside. Beyond him, the open window looked out upon the valley. The first rays of light were rising from a sun which had not yet come up.

"It's five thirty, sir," whispered the servant. "I let you sleep longer this morning."

Then the servant pulled him from his bed and led him across the cold floor to a bathroom. Half asleep, he felt himself being stripped of his pajamas and placed under a shower. Then the icicles hit him. Sharp and frigid, they drove into his back and face and limbs. He leaped into the air in agony as the cold, cold deluge met his blistered legs. He was almost unconscious by the time the servant started rubbing him with a rough towel. Jordan broke away and ran back into bed.

"Say, look, bub," he said to the servant. "I don't know who told you to call me, but don't. Don't wake me at five, don't wake me at six. And don't wake me at eleven unless I tell you that I want to get up very, very early in the morning.

"And I don't bathe in the morning. I bathe at night. I do not bathe in ice; I bathe in warm water. If there is anything that I do not like, that is cold water. Now go away. I am a sick man. I am a cold and sick man."

The servant stood there, smiling.

"Oh, you skiers. You will have your little joke. Why, Mr. Taft, you know as well as I do that you'll be getting up every morning at five and taking your nice cold shower. You'll do it all the time, if you'll pardon a colloquialism. Time really means eternity, you know. And now your massage, sir."

There followed an unspeakable half hour of torture, during which Jordan felt as though he were a professional demonstrator of Iron Marys.

Finally, somehow, Jordan dressed. He went down into the dining room, where only Sally Ransome was left.

She smiled a welcome. "I thought you were never coming. I'd have been out an hour ago but I didn't want you to eat alone. Isn't this a honey of a day?"

"I," said Jordan, "have known better."

"Yes," she went on, "it's glorious here. Every day is colder than the one before it. After you're here ten years or so, you'll find that it will seem like fifty degrees below zero! Imagine how grand the snow is then."

Jordan frowned at Sally, and ordered some orange juice. The servant brought it in a pint-sized glass, and asked if he would have oatmeal or farina, and did he prefer ham or sausages with his eggs?

"I will have one cup of black coffee," said Jordan. "Black."

The servant tittered.

"You're a one, sir. First joking about your shower and now— Why, first thing we know you'll be asking for a cigar!"

Sally giggled.

"You are funny, Mr. Taft. Why, the oatmeal is wonderful this morning. I had two bowls. Lots of brown sugar and I think the cook has mixed in some raw eggs. Jensen, bring Mr. Taft the works!"

She laughed again. Beautiful as she was, Jordan felt slightly revolted at that laughter. Then Jensen brought breakfast. The oatmeal looked as if it were prepared for a hungry family of twelve; the hot milk had skin floating on it.

Jordan swallowed his nausea and said quickly:

"You'll think this is foolish, I know, but isn't there something else we could do today besides ski?"

"Silly boy! As if we could do anything here *but* ski! Just try to do anything else, and you'll see what happens. Why, you could *not* ski if you wanted to—which you don't, of course!

"You know," Sally chattered on and on as he ate, "the funniest thing happened the other day. I was out with Mr. James and we stopped for lunch. It was really hot—only ten below—so we took off our jackets to cool off and found some nice lumps of ice to curl up on. Well, by the time we'd finished, I looked around and our jackets just weren't there any more. Then I realized we'd been sitting on a glacier and it had just moved us along with it. Well, Mr. James had to carry me up because the snow was too deep to walk—and he was *puffing* when we got there. Imagine a man not able to carry me up a hill for a couple of miles on skis without puffing? I only weigh a hundred and forty. Do you think that's too light for cross-country runs?"

"Er, you say we don't come back for lunch?" asked Jordan.

"Oh, no. The lodge simply isn't here in the daytime. It disappears. Comes back about five o'clock. Oh, do hurry! I want you to show me so many things today."

"I suppose," said Jordan, cleverly, "this being Paradise, no one ever gets in . . . well, any skiing accidents?"

"Oh, you!" Sally laughed. And now Jordan hated her and wished she and her laugh were inside a glacier with oatmeal and brown sugar. "Of course we can't die. But if any of us are stupid enough to blunder in the snow, we get hurt. Not that many of us do, but occasionally some fool breaks his leg and has to wait weeks before another one grows. But we're all professionals here, so there's not much danger—even though there's a punishment for those who try to take it easy."

"Punishment," mumbled Jordan. Then he looked around. He was sitting in the snow.

"See," laughed Sally. "I told you the lodge disappeared during the day. Come on, let's ski!"

"Excuse me just a moment," said Jordan. "Got to see a man. Be right back."

He dashed behind a tree stump out of Sally's sight and sat down, panting. What manner of game was this, what doom had he bargained for? Was this icy mess Paradise? Was this the land of milk and honey? No, this was the land of oatmeal and ice—and he would have none of it. Better hell than this. Better nice warm hell fires than fifty below zero. This might be heaven for Gene Taft, wherever he was now—probably enjoying himself in some celestial burlesque house, smoking cigars and drinking gin—but for him it was—

Why not? The thought hit him full in the stomach, or at least in the cold region where a stomach had once functioned. Perhaps he could arrange something with . . well, call him Satan. People did it. They made bargains. And Jordan knew that whatever happened to him now, he'd be getting the best of the bargain. But how did one summon Satan?

Remembering dimly something he had once read, he drew a crude circle in the snow. Then he started mumbling to himself, "Please, Satan, honey, come up here just a minute. Please, Satan, just this once, be a good guy. You don't know what I'd do to leave this heaven-hole, honey, please."

The man standing before him was tall and slim and dressed in a snappy white linen suit.

"I'm delighted to see you, sir," said Jordan sincerely.

"Well, what's this?" asked Satan. "Want to trade heaven for hell, do you? Crazy. But that's your affair."

"Pardon me," said Jordan, beginning to feel like a new man, "but aren't you supposed to wear black? Or red?"

"Quit reading dime magazines," said Satan. "Don't you wear white suits in the summer? Well, it's plenty hot where I live. So I wear them."

"That reminds me," said Jordan. "If I come to you . . . if I trade this no-good heaven for a nice, personal hell—I'd like to have you promise me that it won't get too hot. Say, nothing over ninety degrees."

"Done," said Satan. "You won't find it too hot. It'll be a nice, personal hell, that's all. After all, Jordan, I've had my eye on you for years. You crossed me up in that gin-rummy game, all right. I thought sure I'd get you for some of the things you've done. Hiring killers, driving people to suicide on account of gambling debts. Oh, you certainly fooled me with the Taft switch. But I'm a good sport. I don't hold grudges. Come on, let's get out of here. You'll get your own hell—at your own request."

Jordan's head began to ache. He grew dizzy. The snow melted around him and swirled in pretty patterns over his head. Then there was a period of blackness. Then a great light. Then—

Jordan picked himself up from the snow-covered ground. He looked around him. He was quite alone on a vast snow-covered mountain. He looked down. There was a ski at the end of his leg. He began to sob.

THE END.

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THE DEVIL WE KNOW

BY HENRY KUTTNER

An ingenious little spine-crawler about a demon who accepted slavery to a man in return for a soul — which he said didn't exist anyway. So — what was his true motive — ?

For days the thin, imperative summons had been whispering deep in Carnevan's brain. It was voiceless and urgent, and he likened his mind to a compass needle that would swing, inevitably, toward the nearest magnetic point. It was fairly easy to focus his attention on the business of the moment, but it was, as he had found, somewhat dangerous to relax. The needle wavered and swung imperceptibly, while the soundless cry grew stronger, beating at the citadel of his consciousness. Yet the meaning of the message remained unknown to him.

There was not the slightest question of insanity. Gerald Carnevan was as neurotic as most, and knew it. He held several degrees, and was junior partner in a

flourishing New York advertising concern, contributing most of the ideas. He golfed, swam, and played a fair hand of bridge. He was thirty-seven years old, with the thin, hard face of a Puritan—which he was not—and was being blackmailed, in a mild degree, by his mistress. This he did not especially resent, for his logical mind had summed up the possibilities, arrived at a definite conclusion, and then had forgotten.

And yet he had not forgotten. In the depths of his subconscious the thought remained, and it came to Carnevan now. That, of course, might be the explanation of the—the "voice." A suppressed desire to solve the problem completely. It seemed to fit fairly well, considering Carnevan's recent engagement to Phyllis Mardrake. Phyllis, of Boston stock, would not overlook her fiancé's amours—if they were dragged out into the open. Diana, who was shameless as well as lovely, would not hesitate to do that if matters came to a head.

The compass needle quivered again, swung, and came to a straining halt. Carnevan, who was working late in his office that night, grunted angrily. On an impulse, he leaned back in his chair, tossed his cigarette out the open window, and waited.

Suppressed desires, according to the teachings of psychology, should be brought out into the open, where they could be rendered harmless. With this in mind, Carnevan smoothed all expression from his thin, harsh face and waited. He closed his eyes.

Through the window came the roaring murmur of a New York street. It faded and dimmed almost imperceptibly. Carnevan tried to analyze his sensations. His consciousness seemed inclosed in a sealed box, straining all in one direction. Light patterns faded on his closed lids as the retina adjusted itself.

Voiceless a message came into his brain. He could not understand. It was too alien—incomprehensible.

But at last words formed. A name. A name that hovered on the edge of the darkness, nebulous, inchoate. *Nefert. Nefert.*

He recognized it now. He remembered the seance last week, which he had attended with Phyllis at her request. It had been cheap, ordinary claptrap—trumpets and lights, and voices whispering. The medium held seances thrice a week, in an old brownstone near Columbus Circle. Her name was Madame Nefert—or so she claimed, though she looked Irish rather than Egyptian.

Now Carnevan knew what the voiceless command was. *Go to Madame Nefert,* it told him.

Carnevan opened his eyes. The room was quite unchanged. This was as he had expected. Already some vague theory had formed within his mind, germinating an annoyed anger that someone had been tampering with his most exclusive possession—his *self.* It was, he thought, hypnotism. Somehow, during the seance, Madame Nefert had managed to hypnotize him, and his curious reactions of the past week were due to post-hypnotic suggestion. It was somewhat farfetched, but certainly not impossible.

Carnevan, as an advertising man, inevitably followed certain lines of thought. Madame Nefert would hypnotize a client. That client would return to her, worried and not understanding what had happened, and the medium would probably announce that the spirits were taking a hand. When the client had been properly convinced—the first step in advertising campaigns—Madame Nefert would show her hand, whatever she had to sell.

It was the first tenet of the game. Make the customer believe he needs something. Then sell it to him.

Fair enough. Carnevan rose, lit a cigarette, and pulled on his coat. Adjusting his tie before the mirror, he examined his face closely. He seemed in perfect health, his reactions normal, and his eyes well under control.

The telephone rang sharply. Carnevan picked up the receiver.

"Hello. . . . Diana? How are you, dear?" Despite Diana's blackmailing activities, Carnevan preferred to keep matters running along smoothly, lest they grow more complicated. So he substituted "dear" for another epithet that came to his mind.

"I can't," he said at last. "I've an important call to make tonight. Now wait—I'm not turning you down! I'll put a check in the mail tonight."

This seemed satisfactory, and Carnevan hung up. Diana did not yet know of his forthcoming marriage to Phyllis. He was a little worried about how she would take the news. Phyllis, for all her glorious body, was quite stupid. At first Carnevan had found this attribute relaxing, giving him an illusory feeling of power in the moments when they were together. Now, however, Phyllis' stupidity might prove a handicap.

He'd cross that bridge later. First of all, there was Nefert. *Madame* Nefert. A wry smile touched his lips. By all means, the title. Always look for the trade-mark. It impresses the consumer.

He got his car from the garage of the office building and drove uptown on the parkway, turning off into Columbus Circle. Madame Nefert had a front parlor and a few tawdry rooms which no one ever saw, since they probably contained her equipment. A placard on the window proclaimed the woman's profession.

Carnevan mounted the steps and rang. He entered at the sound of a buzzer, turned right, and pushed through a half-open door which he closed behind him. Drapes had been drawn over the windows. The room was illuminated by a dim, reddish glow from lamps in the corners.

It was bare. The carpet had been pushed aside. Signs had been made on the floor with luminous chalk. A blackened pot stood in the center of a pentagram. That was all, and Carnevan shook his head disgustedly. Such a stage setting would impress only the most credulous. Yet he decided to play along till he got to the bottom of this most peculiar advertising stunt.

A curtain was twitched aside, revealing an alcove in which Madame Nefert sat on a hard, plain chair. The woman had not even troubled to don her customary masquerade, Carnevan saw. With her beefy, red face

and her stringy hair, she resembled a charwoman out of some Shavian comedy. She wore a flowered wrapper, hanging open to reveal a dirty white slip at her capacious bosom.

The red light flickered on her face.

She looked at Carnevan with glassy, expressionless eyes. "The spirits are—" she began, and fell suddenly silent, a choking rattle deep in her throat. Her whole body twitched convulsively.

Suppressing a smile, Carnevan said, "Madame Nefert, I'd like to ask you a few questions."

She didn't answer. There was a long, heavy silence. After a time Carnevan made a tentative movement toward the door, but still the woman did not rouse.

She was playing the game to the hilt. He glanced around, saw something white in the blackened pot, and stepped closer to peer down into the interior. Then he retched violently, clawed out a handkerchief and, holding it over his mouth, whirled to confront Madame Nefert.

But he could not find words. Sanity came back. He breathed deeply, realized that a clever papier-maché image had almost destroyed his emotional balance.

Madame Nefert had not moved. She was leaning forward, breathing in stertorous, rasping gasps. A faint, insidious odor crept into Carnevan's nostrils.

Someone said sharply, "Now!"

The woman's hand moved in a fumbling, uncertain gesture. Simultaneously Carnevan was conscious of a newcomer in the room. He whirled, to see, seated in the middle of the pentagram, a small huddled figure that was regarding him steadily.

The red light was dim. All Carnevan could see was a head, and a shapeless body concealed by a dark cloak as the man—or boy—squatted. Yet the sight of that head was enough to make his heart jump excitedly.

For it was not entirely human. At first Carnevan had thought it was a skull. The face was thin, with pale, translucent skin of finest ivory laid lightly over the bone, and it was completely hairless. It was triangular, delicately wedge-shaped, without the ugly protruding knobs of the cheekbones which make human skulls so often hideous. The eyes were certainly inhuman. They slanted up almost to where the hairline would have been had the being possessed hair, and they were like cloudy, gray-green stone, flecked with opalescent dancing lights, red-tinted now by the light.

It was a singularly beautiful face, with the clear, passionless perfection of polished bone. The body Carnevan could not see, hidden as it was by the cloak.

Was that strange face a mask? Carnevan knew it was not. By the subtle, unmistakable revolt of his whole physical being, he knew that he looked upon a horror.

With an automatic reflex, he took out a cigarette and lighted it. The being had made no move meanwhile, and Carnevan abruptly realized that the compass needle in his brain had vanished.

Smoke coiled up from his cigarette. He, Gerald Carnevan, was standing in this dim, red-lit room, with a fake medium in, presumably, a fake trance behind him, and—something—crouching only a few feet away. Outside, a block distant, was Columbus Circle, with electric signs and traffic.

Electric lights meant advertising. A key clicked in Carnevan's brain. *Get the customer wondering.* In this case he seemed to be the customer. The direct approach was hell on salesmen and their foreplanned tactics. Carnevan began to walk directly toward the being.

The soft, pink, childish lips parted. "Wait," a singularly gentle voice commanded. "Don't cross the pentagram, Carnevan. You can't anyway, but you might start a fire."

"That tears it," the man remarked, almost laughing. "Spirits don't speak colloquial English. What's the idea?"

"Well," said the other, not moving, "to begin with, you may call me Azazel. I'm not a spirit. I'm rather more of a demon. As for colloquial English, when I enter your world I naturally adjust myself to it—or am adjusted. My own tongue cannot be heard here. I'm speaking it, but you hear the Earthly equivalent. It's automatically adjusted to your capabilities."

"All right," Carnevan said. "Now what?" He blew smoke through his nostrils.

"You're skeptical," Azazel said, still motionless. "I could convince you in a moment by leaving the pentagram, but I can't do that without your help. At present, the space I'm occupying exists in both our worlds, coincidentally. I *am* a demon, Carnevan, and I want to strike a bargain with you."

"I expect flashlight bulbs to go off in a moment. But you can fake all the photos you want, if that's the game. I won't pay blackmail," Carnevan said, thinking of Diana and making a mental reservation.

"You do," Azazel remarked, and gave a brief, pithy history of the man's relations with Diana Bellamy.

Carnevan felt himself flushing. "That's enough," said curtly. "It *is* blackmail, eh?"

"Please let me explain—from the beginning. I got in touch with you first at the seance last week. It's incredibly difficult for inhabitants of my . . . my dimension to establish contact with human beings. But in this case I managed it. I implanted certain thoughts in your subconscious mind and held you by those."

"What sort of thoughts?"

"Gratifications," Azazel said. "The death of your senior partner. The removal of Diana Bellamy. Wealth. Power. Triumph. Secretly you treasured those thoughts, and so a link was established between us. Not enough, however, for I couldn't really communicate with you till I'd worked on Madame Nefert."

"Go on," Carnevan said quietly. "She's a charlatan, of course."

"So she is." Azazel smiled. "But she is a Celt. A violin is useless without a violinist. I managed to control her somewhat, and induced her to make the necessary preparations so I could materialize. Then I drew you here."

"Do you expect me to believe you?"

The other's shoulders stirred restlessly. "That is the

difficulty. If you accept me, I can serve you well—very well indeed. But you will not do that until you believe."

"I'm not Faust," Carnevan said. "Even if I did believe you, why do you think I'd want to—" He stopped.

"You are human," Azazel said.

For a second there was silence. Carnevan angrily dropped his cigarette and crushed it out. "All the legends of history," he muttered. "Folklore—all full of it. Bargains with demons. And always at a price. But I'm an atheist, or an agnostic. Not sure which. A soul—I can't believe I have one. When I die, it's a blackout."

Azazel studied him thoughtfully. "There must be a fee, of course." A curious expression crossed the being's face. There was mockery in it, and fear, too. When he spoke again his voice was hurried.

"I can serve you, Carnevan. I can give you anything you desire—everything, I believe."

"Why did you choose me?"

"The seance drew me. You were the only one present I could touch."

Scarcely flattered, Carnevan frowned. It was impossible for him to believe. He said, at last, "I wouldn't mind—if I thought this wasn't merely some trick. Tell me more about it. Just what you could do for me."

Azazel spoke further. When he had finished, Carnevan's eyes were glistening.

"Even a little of that—"

"It is easy enough," Azazel urged. "All is ready. The ceremony does not take long, and I'll guide you step by step."

Carnevan clicked his tongue, smiling. "There it is. I can't believe. I tell myself that you're real—but deep inside my brain I'm trying to find a logical explanation. And that's all too easy. If I were convinced you are what you say and can—"

Azazel interrupted. "Do you know anything about teratology?"

"Eh? Why—just the layman's knowledge."

The being stood up slowly. He was wearing, Carnevan saw, a voluminous cloak of some dark, opaque, shimmering material.

He said, "If there is no other way of convincing you—and since I cannot leave the pentagram—I must take this means."

A sickening premonition shot through Carnevan as he saw delicate, slim hands fumbling at the fastenings of the cloak. Azazel cast it aside.

Almost instantly he wrapped the garment around him. Carnevan had not moved. But there was blood trickling down his chin.

Then silence, till the man tried to speak, a hoarse, croaking noise that rasped through the room. Carnevan found his voice.

Unexpectedly his words came out in a half shriek. Abruptly he whirled and went to a corner, where he stood with his forehead pressed hard against the wall. When he returned, his face was more composed, though sweat gleamed on it.

"Yes," he said. "Yes?"

"This is the way—" Azazel began.

The next morning Carnevan sat at his desk and talked quietly to the demon, who lounged in a chair, invisible to all but one man, and his voice equally masked. Sunlight slanted in through the windows, and a cool breeze brought in the muffled clamor of traffic. Azazel seemed incredibly real sitting there, his body muffled by the cloak, his skull-like, beautiful head whitened by the sunlight.

"Speak softly," the demon cautioned. "No one can hear me, but they can hear you. Whisper—or just think. It will be clear to me."

"Fair enough." Carnevan rubbed his freshly shaven cheek. "We'd better lay out a plan of campaign. You'll have to earn my soul, you know."

"Eh?" For a second the demon looked puzzled; then he laughed softly. "I'm at your service."

"First—we must arouse no suspicion. Nobody would believe the truth, but I don't want them thinking I'm insane—as I may be," Carnevan continued logically. "But we'll not consider that point just now. What about Madame Nefert? How much does she know?"

"Nothing at all," Azazel said. "She was in a trance while under my control. She remembered nothing when she woke. Still, if you prefer, I can kill her."

Carnevan held up his hand. "Steady now! That's just where people like Faust made their mistakes. They went hogwild, got drunk on power, and wrapped themselves up till they couldn't even move. Any murders we may commit must be necessary. Here! Just how much control have I over you?"

"A good deal," Azazel admitted.

"Suppose I asked you to kill yourself—told you to do so?"

For answer, the demon picked up a paper knife from the desk and thrust it deeply into his cloak. Remembering what lay under that garment, Carnevan glanced away hurriedly.

Smiling, Azazel replaced the knife. "Suicide is impossible to a demon, by any means."

"Can't you be killed at all?"

There was a little silence. Then— "Not by you," Azazel said.

Carnevan shrugged. "I'm checking up all the angles. I want to know just where I stand. You must obey me, though. Is that right?"

Azazel nodded.

"So. Now I don't want a million dollars in gold dumped into my lap. Gold's illegal, anyway, and people would ask questions. Any advantages I get must come naturally, without arousing the slightest suspicion. If Ell Dale died, the firm would be without a senior partner. I'd get the job. It carries enough money for my purposes."

"I can get you the largest fortune in the world," the demon suggested.

Carnevan laughed a little. "And then? Everything would be far too easy for me. I want to feel the thrill of achieving things myself—with some help from you. If you cheat once at solitaire, it's different from cheating all through the game. I have a good deal of faith in myself, and want to justify that—build up my ego. People like Faust grew jaded. King Solomon must have been bored to death. Then, too, he never used his brain, and I'll bet it atrophied. Look at Merlin!" Carnevan smiled. "He got so used to calling up devils to do what he wanted that a young snip got the best of him without any trouble. No, Azazel—I want Eli Dale to die, but naturally."

The demon looked at his slim, pale hands.

Carnevan shrugged. "Can you change your form?"

"Of course."

"Into anything?"

For answer, Azazel became, in rapid succession, a large black dog, a lizard, a rattlesnake, and Carnevan himself. Finally he resumed his own form and relaxed again in the chair.

"None of those disguises would help you kill Dale," Carnevan grunted. "We want something that won't be suspected. Do you know what disease germs are, Azazel?"

"I know, from your mind," the other nodded.

"Could you transform yourself into toxins?"

"Why not? If I knew which one you wished, I'd locate a specimen, duplicate its atomic structure, and enter it with my own life force."

"Spinal meningitis," Carnevan said thoughtfully. "That's fatal enough. It'd knock over a man in Dale's senile condition. But I forgot whether it's a germ or a virus."

"That doesn't matter," Azazel said. "I'll locate a slide or specimen of the stuff—some hospital should do—and then materialize inside Dale's body as the disease."

"Will it be the same thing?"

"Yes."

"Good enough. The toxin will propagate, I suppose, and that'll be the end of Dale. If it isn't, we'll try something else."

He turned back to his work, and Azazel vanished. The morning dragged past slowly. Carnevan ate at a nearby restaurant, wondering what his familiar demon was doing, and was rather surprised to find that he had a hearty appetite. During the afternoon, Diana phoned. She had, apparently, found out about Carnevan's engagement to Phyllis. She had already telephoned Phyllis.

Carnevan hung up, rigidly repressing his violent rage. After a brief moment he dialed Phyllis' number. She was not at home, he was told.

"Tell her I'll be out to see her tonight," he growled, and slammed the receiver down in its cradle. It was rather a relief to look up and see the shrouded form of Azazel in the chair.

"It's done," the demon said. "Dale has spinal meningitis. He doesn't know it yet, but the toxin propagated very rapidly. A curious experiment. But it worked."

Carnevan tried to focus his mind. It was Phyllis he was thinking of now. He was in love with her, of course—but she was so rigid, so incredibly Puritanical. He had made one slip in the past. In her eyes, that might be enough. Would she break the engagement? Surely not! In this day and age, amorous peccadilloes were more or less taken for granted, even by a girl who had been reared in Boston. Carnevan considered his fingernails.

After a time he made an excuse to see Eli Dale, asking his advice on some unimportant business problem, and scrutinized carefully the old man's face. Dale was flushed and bright-eyed, but otherwise seemed normal. Yet the mark of death was on him, Carnevan knew. He would die, the senior partnership would devolve on someone else—and the first step in Carnevan's plan was taken.

As for Phyllis and Diana—why, after all, he owned a familiar demon! With the powers at his control, he could solve this problem, too. Just how he would do that, Carnevan did not know as yet; ordinary methods, he thought, should be used first in every case. He must not grow too dependent on magic.

He dismissed Azazel for the time and drove that night to Phyllis' home. But before that, he made a stop at Diana's apartment. The scene was brief and stormy while it lasted.

Dark, slim, furious and lovely, Diana said she wouldn't let him marry.

"Why not?" Carnevan wanted to know. "After all, my dear, if you want money, I can arrange that."

Diana said unpleasant things about Phyllis. She hurled an ash tray down and stamped on it. "So I'm not good enough to marry! But she is!"

"Sit down and be quiet," Carnevan suggested. "Try and analyze your feelings—"

"You cold-blooded fish!"

"—and see just where you stand. You're not in love with me. Dangling me on a string gives you a feeling of power and possession. You don't want any other woman to have me."

"I pity any woman who does," Diana remarked, selecting another ash tray. She looked remarkably pretty, but Carnevan was in no mood to appreciate beauty.

"All right," he said. "Listen to me. If you string along, you won't lack for money—or anything. But if you try to cause trouble again, you'll certainly regret it."

"I don't scare easily," Diana snapped. "Where are you going? Off to see that yellow-haired wench, I suppose?"

Carnevan favored her with an imperturbable smile, donned his topcoat, and vanished. He drove to the home of the yellow-haired wench, where he encountered not-unforeseen difficulties. But finally he out-argued the maid and was ushered in to face an icicle sitting silently on a couch. It was Mrs. Mardrake.

"Phyllis does not wish to see you, Gerald," she said, her prim mouth biting off the words.

Carnevan girded his loins and began to talk. He talked well. So convincing was his story that he almost persuaded himself that Diana was a myth—that the whole affair had been cooked up by some personal enemy. Mrs. Mardrake finally capitulated, after an internal struggle of some length.

"There must be no scandal," she said at last. "If I thought there was a word of truth in what that woman said to Phyllis—"

"A man in my position has enemies." Carnevan said, thus reminding his hostess that, maritally speaking, he was a fish worth hooking. She sighed.

"Very well, Gerald. I'll ask Phyllis to see you. Wait here."

She swept out of the room, and Carnevan suppressed a smile. Yet he knew it would not be this easy to convince Phyllis.

She did not appear immediately. Carnevan guessed that Mrs. Mardrake was having difficulty in persuading her daughter of his bona fides. He wandered about the room, taking out his cigarette case and then, with a glance at the surroundings, putting it back. What a Victorian house!

A heavy family bible on its stand caught his eye. For want of anything else to do, he went toward it, opening the book at random. A passage leaped up at him.

"If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God."

It was, perhaps, an instinctive reaction that made Carnevan reach up to touch his forehead. He smiled at the conceit. Superstition! Yes—but so were demons.

At that moment Phyllis came in, looking like Evangeline in Acadia, with much the same martyred expression Longfellow's heroine might have worn. Suppressing an ungallant impulse to kick her, Carnevan reached for her hands, failed to capture them, and followed her to a couch.

Puritanism and a pious upbringing has its drawbacks, he thought. This became more evident when, after ten minutes, Phyllis still remained unconvinced of Carnevan's innocence.

"I didn't tell mother everything," she said quietly. "That woman said some things— Well, I could see she was telling the truth."

"I love you," Carnevan said inconsequentially.

"You don't. Or you'd never have taken up with this woman."

"Even if it happened before I knew you?"

"I could forgive many things, Gerald," she said, "but not that."

"You," Carnevan remarked, "don't want a husband. You want a graven image."

It was impossible to break through her calm self-righteousness. Carnevan lost his self-possession. He argued and pleaded, despising himself as he did so. Of all the women in the world, he had to fall in love with the most hide-bound and Puritanical of them all. Her silence had the quality of enraging him almost to hysteria. He had an impulse to shout obscenities into the room's quiet, religious atmosphere. Phyllis, he knew, was humiliating him horribly, and deep within him something cowered rawly under the lashing he could not stop himself from giving it.

"I love you, Gerald," was all she would say. "But you don't love me. I can't forgive you this. Please go before you make it worse."

He flung out of the house, seething with fury, hot and sick with the realization that he had failed to maintain his poise. Phyllis, Phyllis, Phyllis! An imperturbable iceberg. She knew nothing of humanity. Emotions had never existed in her breast unless they were well-schooled, dainty as an antimacassar of lace. A china doll, expecting the rest of the world to be of china. Carnevan stood by his car, shaking with rage, wishing more than anything else on earth to hurt Phyllis as he himself had been hurt.

Something stirred inside the car. It was Azazel, the cloak shrouding his dark body, the bone-white face expressionless.

Carnevan flung out an arm behind him, pointing. "The girl!" he said hoarsely. "She . . . she—"

"You need not speak," Azazel murmured. "I read your thoughts. I shall—do as you wish."

He was gone. Carnevan sprang into the car, inserted the key, savagely started the motor. As the vehicle began to move he heard a thin, knife-edged scream lancing out from the house he had left.

He stopped the car and raced back, chewing his lip.

As the hastily summoned physician said, Phyllis Mardrake had suffered a severe nervous shock. The reason was unknown, but, presumably, it might have been the ordeal of her interview with Carnevan, who said nothing to dispel that illusion. Phyllis simply lay and twitched, her eyes staring glassily. Sometimes her lips formed words.

"The cloak— Under the cloak—"

And then she would alternately laugh and scream until exhaustion claimed her.

She would recover, but it would take some time. In the meanwhile, Phyllis was sent to a private sanitarium, where she fell into hysterics whenever she saw Dr. Joss, who happened to be bald-headed. Her jabbering about cloaks grew less frequent, and occasionally Carnevan was permitted to visit her. She asked for him. The quarrel had been patched up, and Phyllis almost half admitted that she had been wrong in her stand.

When she had completely recovered she would marry Carnevan. But there must be no more slips.

The horror she had seen was buried deep in her mind, emerging only during delirium, and in her frequent nightmares. Carnevan was thankful that she did not remember Azazel. Yet he saw much of the demon these days—for he was fulfilling a malicious, cruel little scheme of his own.

It had started soon after Phyllis's breakdown, when Diana kept telephoning him at the office. At first Car-

nevan spoke shortly to her. Then he realized that she, actually, was responsible for Phyllis's near-madness.

It was, of course, right that she should suffer. Not death. Anyone might die. Eli Dale, for example, was already fatally ill with spinal meningitis. But a more subtle form of punishment—a torture such as Phyllis had undergone.

Carnevan's face wore an expression that was not pleasant to see as he summoned the demon and issued instructions.

"Slowly, gradually, she will be driven insane," he said. "She will be given time to realize what is happening. Give her—glimpses, so to speak. A cumulative series of inexplicable happenings. I'll give you the detailed directions when I work them out. She told me that she isn't easily frightened," Carnevan finished, and rose to pour himself a drink. He offered one to the demon, but it was refused.

Azazel sat motionless in a dark corner of the apartment, occasionally glancing out of the window to where Central Park lay far below.

Carnevan was struck by a sudden thought. "How do you react to this? Demons are supposed to be evil. Does it give you pleasure to . . . hurt people?"

The beautiful skull face was turned toward him. "Do you know what evil is, Carnevan?"

The man splashed soda into his rye. "I see. A matter of semantics. Of course, it's an arbitrary term. Humanity has set up its own standards—"

Azazel's slanted, opalescent eyes glittered. "That is moral anthropomorphism. And egotism. You haven't considered environment. The physical properties of this world of yours caused good and evil, as you know it."

It was Carnevan's sixth drink, and he felt argumentative. "That I don't quite understand. Morality comes from the mind and the emotions."

"A river has its source," Azazel countered. "But there's a difference between the Mississippi and the Colorado. If human beings had evolved in—well, my world, for example—the whole pattern of good and evil would have been entirely different. Ants have a social structure. But it isn't like yours. The environment is different."

"There's a difference between insects and men, too."

The demon shrugged. "We are not alike. Less alike than you and an ant. For both of you have, basically, two common instincts. Self-preservation and propagation of the species. Demons can't propagate."

"Most authorities agree on that," Carnevan granted. "Possibly it explains the reason for changelings, too. How is it that there are so many kinds of demons?"

Azazel questioned him with his eyes.

"Oh—you know. Gnomes and kobolds and trolls and jinn and werewolves and vampires and—"

"There are more kinds of demons than humanity knows," Azazel explained. "The reason is pretty obvious. Your world tends toward a fixed pattern—a state of stasis. You know what entropy is. The ultimate aim of your universe is a unity, changeless and eternal. Your branches of evolution will finally meet and remain at one fixed type. Such offshoots as the moa and the auk will die out, as dinosaurs and mammoths have died. In the end there will be stasis. My universe tends toward physical anarchy. In the beginning there was only one type. In the end it will be ultimate chaos."

"Your universe is like a negative of mine," Carnevan pondered. "But—wait! You said demons can't die. And they can't propagate. How can there be any progress at all?"

"I said demons can't commit suicide," Azazel pointed out. "Death may come to them, but from an outside source. That applies to procreation, too."

It was too confused for Carnevan. "You must have emotions. Self-preservation implies fear of death."

"Our emotions are not yours. Clinically, I can analyze and understand Phyllis' reactions. She was reared very rigidly, and subconsciously she has resented that oppression. She never admitted, even to herself, her desire to break free. But you were a symbol to her. Secretly she admired and envied you, because you were a man and, as she thought, able to do whatever you wanted. Love is a false synonym for propagation, as the soul is a wish fulfillment creation growing out of self-preservation. Neither exists. Phyllis's mind is a maze of inhibitions, fears, and hopes. Puritanism, to her, represents security. That was why she couldn't forgive you for your affair with Diana. It was an excuse for retreating to the security of her former life pattern."

Carnevan listened interestedly. "Go on."

"When I appeared to her, the psychic shock was violent. Her subconscious ruled for a time. That was why she became reconciled to you. She is an escapist; her previous security seemed to have failed, so she fulfills both her escape wish and her desire for protection by agreeing to marry you."

Carnevan mixed himself another drink. He remembered something.

"You just said the soul is nonexistent—eh?"

Azazel's body stirred under the shrouding cloak. "You misunderstood me."

"I don't think so," Carnevan said, feeling a cold, deadly horror under the warm numbness of liquor. "Our bargain was that you serve me in exchange for my soul. Now you imply that I have no soul. What was your real motive?"

"You're trying to frighten yourself," the demon murmured, his strange eyes alert. "All through history, religion has been founded on the hypothesis that souls exist."

"Do they?"

"Why not?"

"What is a soul like?" Carnevan asked.

"You couldn't imagine," Azazel said. "There'd be no standard of comparison. By the way, Eli Dale died two minutes ago. You're now the senior partner of the firm. May I congratulate you?"

"Thank you," Carnevan nodded. "We'll change the subject, if you like. But I intend to find out the truth

sooner or later. If I have no soul, you're up to something else. However—let's get back to Diana."

"You wish to drive her mad."

"I wish *you* to drive her mad. She is the schizophrenic type—slim and long boned. She has a stupid sort of self-confidence. She has built her life on a foundation of things she knows to be real. Those things must be removed."

"Well?"

"She is afraid of the dark," Carnevan said, and his smile was quite unpleasant. "Be subtle, Azazel. She will hear voices. She will see people following her. Delusions of persecution. One by one her senses will begin to fail her. Or, rather, deceive her. She'll smell things no one else does. She'll hear voices. She'll taste poison in her food. She'll begin to feel things—unpleasant things. If necessary, she may, at the last—see things."

"This is evil, I suppose," Azazel observed, rising from his chair. "My interest is purely clinical. I can reason that such matters are important to you, but that's as far as it goes."

The telephone rang. Carnevan learned that Eli Dale was dead—spinal meningitis.

To celebrate the occasion, he poured another drink and toasted Azazel, who had vanished to visit Diana. Carnevan's thin, hard face was only slightly flushed by the liquor he had consumed. He stood in the center of the apartment and revolved slowly, eying the furnishings, the books, the bric-a-brac. It would be well to find another place—something a bit more swanky. A place suitable for a married couple. He wondered how long it would be before Phyllis was completely recovered.

Azazel— Just what was the demon after?—he wondered. Certainly not his soul. What, then?

One night two weeks later, he rang the bell of Diana's apartment. The girl's voice asked who was there, and she opened the door a slight crack before admitting Carnevan. He was shocked at the change in her.

There was little tangible alteration. Diana was holding herself under iron control, but her make-up was too heavy. That in itself was revealing. It was a symbol of the mental shield she was trying to erect against the psychical invasion. Carnevan said solicitously, "Diana, what's wrong? You sounded hysterical over the phone. I told you last night you should see a doctor."

She fumbled for a cigarette, which trembled slightly in her hands as Carnevan lit it. "I have. He . . . he wasn't much help, Jerry. I'm so glad you're not angry at me any more."

"Angry? Here, sit down. That's it. I'll mix a drink. No, I got over being angry; we get along together, and Phyllis—well, we couldn't very well have a *ménage a trois*. She's in a sanitarium, you know, and it'll be a long while before she gets out. Even then she may be a lunatic—" Carnevan sucked in his breath. "Sorry."

Diana pushed back her dark hair and turned to face him on the couch. "Jerry, do you think I'm going crazy?"

"No, I don't," "I think you need a rest, or a change."

She didn't hear. Her head was tilted to one side, as though she listened to a soundless voice. Glancing up, Carnevan saw Azazel standing across the room—invisible to the girl, but apparently not inaudible.

"Diana!" he said sharply.

Her lips parted. Her voice was unsteady as she looked at him. "Sorry. You were saying?"

"What did the doctor tell you?"

"Nothing much." She did not wish to follow up the line of discussion. Instead, she took the drink Carnevan had mixed, eyed it, and sipped the highball. Then she put down the glass.

"Anything wrong?" the man asked.

"No. How does it taste to you?"

"All right."

Carnevan wondered just what Diana had tasted in her drink. Bitter almonds, perhaps. Another of Azazel's deft illusions. He ran his fingers through the girl's hair, feeling a thrill of power as he did so. A nasty sort of revenge, he thought. Odd that Diana's distress did not touch him in the slightest degree. Yet he was not basically evil, Carnevan knew. The old, old problem of arbitrary standards—right and wrong.

Azazel said—and his words were heard by Carnevan alone: "Her control cannot last much longer. I think she'll break tomorrow. A manic-depressive may commit suicide, so I'll guard against that. Every dangerous weapon she touches will seem red-hot to her."

Abruptly, without warning, the demon vanished. Carnevan grunted and finished his drink. From the corner of his eye he saw something move.

Slowly he turned his head, but it was gone. What had it been? Like a black shadow. Formless, inchoate. Without reason, Carnevan's hands were shaking. Utterly amazed, he put down his drink and surveyed the apartment.

Azazel's presence had never affected him thus before. It was probably a reaction—no doubt he had been keeping a tight control over his nerves, without noticing it. After all, demons *are* supernatural.

From the corner of his eye he again saw the cloudy blackness. This time he did not move as he tried to analyze it. The thing hovered just on the edge of his range of vision. Imperceptibly, his eyes moved slightly, and it was gone.

A formless black cloud. Formless? No, it was, he thought, spindle-shaped, motionless and upright on its axis. His hands were shaking more than ever.

Diana was eying him. "What's the matter, Jerry? Am I making you nervous?"

"Too much work at the office," he said. "I'm the new senior partner, you know. I'll push off now. You'd better see that doctor again tomorrow."

She did not reply, only watched him as he let himself out of the apartment. Driving home, Carnevan again caught a brief glimpse of the black, foggy spindle. Not once could he get a clear view of it. It hovered just on

the border of his vision. He sensed, though he could not see, certain features cloudily discerned in it. What they were he could not guess. But his hands trembled.

Coldly, furiously, his intellect fought against the unreasonable terror of his physical structure. He faced the alien. Or— No—he did not face it. It slid away and vanished. Azazel?

He called the demon's name, but there was no response. Hurtling toward his apartment, Carnevan sucked at his lower lip and thought hard. How— Why—

What was so unreasonably, subtly horrifying about this—this apparition?

He did not know, unless it was, perhaps, that vague hint of features in the blackness which he could never face directly. He sensed that those features were unspeakable, and yet he had a perverse curiosity to behold them directly. Once safe in his apartment, he again glimpsed the black spindle, at the edge of his vision, near the window. He swung swiftly to face it; it vanished. But at that moment a shock of unreasoning horror gripped Carnevan, a deadly, sickening feeling that he might see that against which his whole physical being revolted.

"Azazel," he called softly.

Nothing.

"Azazel!"

Carnevan poured a drink, lit a cigarette and found a magazine. He was untroubled until bedtime and during the night, but in the morning, when first he opened his eyes, something black and spindle-shaped skittered away as he looked toward it.

He telephoned Diana. She seemed much better, she said. Apparently Azazel wasn't on the job. Unless the black thing *was* Azazel. Carnevan hurriedly drove to his office, had black coffee sent up, and then drank milk instead. His nerves needed soothing rather than stimulating.

Twice that morning the black spindle appeared in the office. Each time there was that horrifying knowledge that if Carnevan looked at it directly, the features would be clear to him. And in spite of himself, he tried to look. Vainly, of course.

His work suffered. Presently he knocked off and drove to the sanitarium to see Phyllis. She was much better, and spoke of the forthcoming marriage. Carnevan's palms were clammy as a black spindle retreated hurriedly across the sunny, pleasant room.

Worst of all, perhaps, was the realization that if he *did* succeed in looking squarely at the phantasm, he would not go mad. But he would want to. That he realized quite well. His instinctive physical reaction told him as much. Nothing belonging to this universe or any remotely kindred one could bring about the empty hollowness within his body, the shocking feeling that his cellular structure was trying to shrink away from the— the spindle.

He drove to Manhattan, narrowly avoiding an accident on the George Washington Bridge as he closed his eyes to avoid seeing what wasn't there when he opened them again. It was past sundown. The jeweled towers of New York rose against a purple sky. Their geometrical neatness looked devoid of warmth, inhospitable and unhelpful. Carnevan stopped at a bar, drank two whiskeys, and left when a black spindle ran across the mirror.

Back in his apartment, he sat with his head in his hands for perhaps five minutes. When he stood up, his face was hard and vicious. His eyes flickered slightly; then he caught himself.

"Azazel," he said—and, more loudly: "Azazel! I am your master! Appear to me!"

His thought probed out, forceful, hard as iron. Behind it lay unformed terror. Was Azazel the black spindle? Would he appear—completely?

"Azazel! I am your master! Obey me! I summon you!"

The demon stood before Carnevan, materializing from empty air. The beautiful face of pale bone was expressionless; the slanted, opalescent, pupilless eyes were impassive. Under the dark cloak, Azazel's body shivered once and was still.

With a sigh, Carnevan sank down in his chair. "All right," he said. "Now what's up? What's the idea?"

Azazel said quitely, "I went back to my own world. I would have remained there had you not summoned me."

"What is this—spindle thing?"

"It is not of your world," the demon said. of mine. It pursues me."

"Why?"

"You have your stories of men who have been haunted. Sometimes by demons. In my world—I have been haunted."

Carnevan licked his lips. "By this thing?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

Azazel's shoulders seemed to hunch together. "I do not know. Except that it is very horrible, and it pursues me."

Carnevan lifted his hands and pushed hard at his eyes. "No. No. It's too crazy. *Something* haunting a demon. Where did it come from?"

"I know of my universe and yours. That is all. This thing came from outside both our time sectors, I think."

With a sudden flash of insight, Carnevan said, "That was why you offered to serve me."

Azazel's face did not change. "Yes. The thing was getting closer and closer to me. I thought if I entered your universe, I might escape it. But it followed."

"And you couldn't enter this world without my help. All that talk about my soul was so much guff."

"Yes. The thing followed me. I fled back to my universe, and it did not pursue. Perhaps it could not. It may be able to move in only one direction—from its world to mine, and then to yours, but not the other way. It remained here, I know."

"It remained," Carnevan said, very white, "to haunt me."

"You feel the same horror toward it? I wondered. We are so unlike physically—"

"I never see it directly. It has—features?"

Azazel did not answer. Silence hung in the room.

At last Carnevan bent forward in his chair. "The thing haunts you—unless you go back to your own world. Then it haunts me. Why?"

"I don't know. It's alien to me, Carnevan."

"But you're a demon! You have supernatural powers—"

"Supernatural to you. There are powers supernatural to demons."

Carnevan poured himself a drink. His eyes were narrowed.

"Very well. I have enough power over you to keep you in this world, or you wouldn't have returned when I summoned you. So it's a deadlock. As long as you stay here, that thing will haunt you. I won't let you go to *your* world, for then it would haunt me—as it has been doing. Though it seems to be gone now."

"It has not gone," Azazel said tonelessly.

Carnevan's body shook uncontrollably. "Mentally I can tell myself not to be frightened. Physically the thing is . . . is—"

"It is horrible even to me," Azazel said. "Remember, I have seen it directly. Eventually it will destroy me, if you keep me in this world of yours."

"Humans have exorcised demons," Carnevan pointed out. "Isn't there any way you can exorcise that thing?"

"No."

"A blood sacrifice?" Carnevan suggested nervously. "Holy water? Bell, book and candle?" He sensed the foolishness of the proposals as he made them.

But Azazel looked thoughtful. "None of those. But perhaps—life force." The dark cloak quivered.

Carnevan said, "Elementals have been exorcised, according to folklore. But first it's necessary to make them visible and tangible. Giving them ectoplasm—blood—I don't know."

The demon nodded slowly. "In other words, translating the equation to its lowest common denominator. Humans cannot fight a disembodied spirit. But if that spirit is drawn into a vessel of flesh, it is subject to earthly physical laws. I think that is the way, Carnevan."

"You mean—"

"The thing that pursues me is entirely alien. But if I can reduce it to its lowest common denominator, I can destroy it. As I could destroy you, had I not promised to serve you. And, of course, if your destruction would help me. Suppose I give that thing a sacrifice. It must, for a time, partake of the nature of the thing it assimilates. Human life force should do."

Carnevan listened eagerly. "Will it work?"

"I think it will. I will give the thing a human sacrifice. It will become, briefly and partially, human, and a demon can easily destroy a human being."

"A sacrifice—"

"Diana. It will be easiest, since I already have weakened the fortress of her consciousness. I must break down all the barriers of her brain—a psychical substitute for the sacrificial knife of pagan religions."

Carnevan gulped the last of his drink. "Then you can destroy the thing?"

Azazel nodded. "That is my belief. But what will be left of Diana will be in no way human. You will be asked questions by the authorities. However, I shall try to protect you."

And with that he vanished before Carnevan could raise an objection. The apartment was deadly still. Carnevan looked around, half expecting to see the black spindle flashing away as he glanced toward it. But there was no trace of anything supernatural.

He was still sitting in the chair, half an hour later, when the telephone rang. Carnevan answered it.

"Yes. . . . Who? . . . *What!* Murdered? . . . No, I . . . I'll be right over."

He replaced the receiver and straightened, eyes aglow. Diana was—was dead. Murdered, quite horribly, and there were certain factors that puzzled the police. Well, he was safe. Suspicion might point at him, but nothing could ever be proved. He had not gone near Diana all that day.

"Congratulations, Azazel," Carnevan said softly. He crushed out his cigarette and turned to get his topcoat from the closet.

The black spindle had been waiting behind him. This time it did not flash away as he looked at it.

It did not flash away. Carnevan saw it. He saw it distinctly. He saw every feature of what he had mistakenly imagined to be a spindle of black fog.

The worst part of it was that Carnevan didn't go mad.

THE END.

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THE PSYCHOMORPH

BY E. A. GROSSER

A very pleasing personality, the Psychomorph. Always the person you most wanted to see—

Two men sat in front of the entirely useless fireplace, watching the flames. They were roughing it in a centrally heated mountain lodge. Suddenly two words quavered on the crisp spring evening air:

"I'm co-old!"

Baker, a few years older and heavier of build, mumbled at him around the stem of his pipe, "Well, move closer to the fire then, Manning. But don't cry about it."

Manning looked up. "What's the matter with you?" he asked resentfully. "I didn't say anything."

Baker sucked noisily at his pipe, got a drink, and made a wry face.

"Imagination, maybe," he said doubtfully after a mo-

ment. "I thought I heard someone say, 'I'm cold!'—almost crying."

"I was thinking," Manning replied indifferently; intimating that he hadn't said anything, hadn't heard anything.

Baker grinned. "Thinking of Elaine?"

"Huh? Oh, yes. Peggy shouldn't have insisted. Elaine didn't want to go to town."

"And you didn't want her to go," Baker completed with a laugh. "It'll be different in a few years. Peggy was glad to get away from me for a while, and I was just as glad to have her go."

"Don't you . . uh . love her?"

"Sure! Don't be silly. But a change is good for anyone. She wouldn't look at another man—I hope!"

"I'm so cold. Let me in."

Both men tensed. The sound seemed to have come from outside.

Baker exploded. "I didn't imagine that! Did you hear it, too?"

Manning nodded. Baker laid his pipe on the table and went to the door. Hand on the latch, he waited, listening.

"I'm so-o-o-o—" There was the sound of something falling.

Baker snatched open the door. Then he knelt beside the crumpled figure on the doorstep.

"You little fool! Don't you know enough to knock on a door?"

Smooth, silken blond hair had cascaded forward, hiding the face but exposing a satin-skinned neck. The unconscious girl wasn't wearing a coat—just a light jacket over a colorful frock. Something about them struck Baker as familiar.

He grasped the soft shoulders and half lifted her, then brushed her hair from her face. The flesh was cold and puttylike beneath his hand, and the hair tangled his fingers as though alive. But he hardly noticed. His eyes were fastened on the quiet face.

"Peggy! Oh, God! They must have had an accident with the car!" He lifted the still form in his arms and started toward the bedroom. "Manning! You go down the mountain and find Elaine."

But Mannnig was staring at the figure in his arms like a man hypnotized. "Pat . Patricia," he mumbled. "You shouldn't have followed." He stepped forward with arms out, as though to take Baker's burden.

"Manning! You fool! Can't you hear? I'll take care of Peggy. You go down and find Elaine!"

The telephone started to ring, one or two short, sharp yelps and then a continuous strident alarm, as though the girl at central had grown tired and were resting on the switch.

Baker shouldered Manning aside. "Then answer that phone, and I'll get Elaine myself after I've taken care of Peggy."

He looked back as he went through the door and saw Manning moving toward the phone like an automaton. He kicked open the bedroom door and gently laid Peggy on the bed. Then hurried out to get the electric blanket. The coldness of her flesh frightened him.

Manning was standing at the table, telephone receiver dangling in his fingers. His face was pale as he looked up at Baker's entrance.

Baker started across the room toward the closet. Manning held out the telephone to him.

"Here," he said tonelessly.

Baker brushed him aside again. His lips curled as he looked at the younger man. "Aren't you a little curious about Elaine?"

Manning looked toward the door leading to the bedroom, then back at Baker. "Here," he said again.

"Hang up!" Baker said. "I haven't got time to talk to anyone now. Do you think it's within your capabilities to phone for a doctor?"

"Here," Manning insisted, offering the phone again. "It's Peggy. She wants to talk to you."

"Huh!" Baker ceased burrowing in the closet and faced Manning with questioning eyes.

"You're crazy," he said, but nevertheless he took the telephone from the younger man's hand.

"Hello!" he barked.

"O-o-oh! What a nasty voice you have!"

"The better to—" he started from habit, then halted. "Is that you, Peggy?"

"Uh-hm-m-m," she replied. "Who were you expecting?"

Baker ignored her question, though he couldn't doubt her words. Her voice was too familiar. But Peggy was in the bedroom!

"Are you sure?" he asked inanely.

"Yes, certain!" Peggy snapped. "And you leave the liquor alone for the rest of the evening." She stopped then, seeming to regret her words. "Listen, darling," she continued, "Drew Pierce's new picture, 'Sands of Flame,' is playing here tonight and Elaine and I want to see it. Do you mind?"

"Put it off! Will you, Peg? Somebody just wandered in and fainted on our doorstep."

He waited for her to speak, but she hesitated doubtfully. He knew what she was thinking. He hurried on: "She looks just like—" He stopped short. He had intended to tell her that the stranger looked just like her, but under the circumstances he knew that to be inadvisable. "She looks just like a queen—a beauty!"

"And you want me to come home?" Peggy teased.

"Yes! This is straight goods, Peg. Come on and give me a hand. There's something wrong. It's pleasantly cool to-night, yet she's as cold as an iceberg."

"Oh," Peggy said understandingly. Then she was serious. "I'll come, and bring a doctor."

"Thanks, baby. 'By."

He started to hang up, but a call from the phone made him put it back to his ear.

"George, darling," Peggy said.

"Yes?"

"If you're tight, I'll help him use a stomach pump on you."

"And I'll let you. It's a deal! Now, hurry!"

He put the phone back in its cradle and turned to face Manning. Manning was gone! Baker listened and thought he heard a voice from the bedroom. He cursed and dug hurriedly in the closet until he located the electric blanket, then started back to the bedroom.

Manning was on his knees at the side of the bed. He held one of the strange girl's nearly frozen hands in his, pressing it to his lips.

"Patricia! Don't die! You must live! We have so much to live for—so much to do! We were silly to quarrel, and I was a beast to marry Elaine. I don't know why I did. I was mad! I wanted to hurt you!"

Baker stepped into the room. Manning looked up, flushed guiltily, but didn't leave the bedside.

"There's more to you, kid, than I thought," Baker grumbled, then smiled bitterly. "And to think I was giving you advice. Come on! Give me a hand!"

Together they wrapped the strange girl in the heating blanket, then watched. Gradually color came back to her face. Baker had to admit she was pretty; as pretty as Peggy had been on their wedding day. And so much like her that they might have been twin sisters.

"How is it you never mentioned knowing a girl who looks so much like Peggy?" he asked.

Manning looked at him oddly. "What do you mean—so much like Peggy? Patricia doesn't look anything like your wife."

Baker stared at him. "One of us is nuts," he said at last, and the stare left no doubt as to who, in his opinion, was the one.

Manning shrugged, and his eyes went back to the girl as though drawn by a magnet. Baker looked, too. Her cheeks, counterparts of Peggy's, were flushing with returning life. The tightness had left the mouth and it appeared soft and inviting.

"It's going to be rough on Elaine," he said.

"Don't say anything," Manning pleaded. "I'm the one to tell her."

"O. K., but see that you do. Don't be a bigger heel than you are already."

It was as though Manning hadn't heard him. Baker stared at a spot a trifle to one side of the point of the younger man's chin. He considered how nice it would feel to hit that spot with a bunch of knuckles. It was a raw deal he was handing to a young kid like Elaine!

He turned abruptly on his heel and went out the door, growling, "I guess you can keep an eye on her until the girls and the doctor get here."

He went back to his seat in front of the fire and waited. He tried not to think. He listened. From the bedroom came Manning's pleading monotone. The young fool had no sense of shame! Baker gritted his teeth.

Then, for something to do, he cleaned and filled his pipe. Manning's pleas had ceased. The house was as silent as a mine, except for the crackling of the fire. He scratched a match to light his pipe.

A door creaked protestingly. Baker leaped to his feet and faced the direction from which the sound had come. Then the tenseness left his muscles.

The stranger was standing in the doorway of the bedroom, smiling, holding onto the door which he had left open as though to support herself. Her smile was infectious. Baker smiled. He looked past her, into the bedroom, expecting to see Manning directly behind her. But he wasn't to be seen.

"You should stay in bed," he reproved. He felt that it was like scolding Peggy. "Where's Manning?"

The strange girl smiled and stepped into the hall. She pulled the door shut and it creaked protestingly again. She walked toward him slowly, glidingly—smiling.

"The poor boy was tired," she said with a queerness in her voice that Baker hesitated to label an accent. "He was so tired that he fell asleep on his knees at the side of the bed with my hand at his lips. Oh, what a nice fire—so warm!"

She tugged at one of the chairs to draw it closer. Baker stooped to help her. His hands touched hers, and he tensed. Her flesh was as cold as a reptile's.

He looked up, and into eyes that were identical with Peggy's. He shook his head and shoved the chair nearer the fire. It was too much for him.

He sat down again in the other chair and struck another match to light his pipe. He puffed contentedly, waiting to see what she would say. He wished he had the nerve to ask how much she cared for Manning—wished he could persuade her to throw him down hard—leave him for Elaine. Elaine—who had been almost pitifully happy for two months.

"You are a strange man," the girl said at last.

"Yes," Baker returned.

"Yes," she agreed with a dimpling smile. "The other—Manning—talks all the time. You talk not at all—just puff-puff-puff. And you look so comfortable."

It seemed to Baker that she moved imperceptibly closer to the fire. He watched her through narrowed eyes. "You speak as though you don't know Manning very well," he sparred.

She ignored his remark and stared at his pipe. "You look so comfortable," she repeated. "May I try it?"

"What? My pipe?"

She nodded, and Baker laughed.

"Anybody'd think you'd never seen a pipe before," he chuckled.

She was silent, so silent that Baker felt that he must have hurt her feelings. He held out the pipe to her. "Here, take a puff if you want to. But look out—it's strong."

He had to lean toward her to give her the pipe. She took it with a smile, looked at it strangely, then placed the stem between her lips. She breathed deeply.

Baker grinned, expecting her to cough. But she blew the smoke from her throat with an expression of disgust and returned the pipe. He took it, staring at her, and it was a moment before he became aware that their hands were still in contact.

An aura of power seemed to emanate from her, surround him, sap his will. Anyway, what was the difference? It would be like making love to Peggy, this stranger was so much like her. And he knew from the

blue eyes so near his that she was willing. He leaned forward—and seemed to catapult into a mist-filled pit.

Cold fingers of fog curled around him, searching for —life. And sucking away all his warmth. It seemed hours that he shivered and trembled, then a voice reached him.

"No. Not all—now! Come back!"

He lifted his head. He had fallen sideward over the arm of his chair. He shook his head to clear his sight. He looked at the other chair. It was empty!

He heard feet on the stairs and a moment later the door opened to admit Peggy, Elaine, and a wizened doctor. Baker lumbered to his feet, staggered to meet them. Peggy watched him critically, then slipped her jacket off and laid it over the back of the chair.

"All right, doctor," she said, "the stomach pump."

"Wait! Peggy, I haven't been drinking."

"I didn't say you had. I just know you're higher than a kite."

"But she was here a minute ago," Baker said. He cursed the thickness of this tongue and the dullness of his mind. He couldn't seem to think.

Then he saw that they were staring past him. He turned. Peggy's replica was standing in the hall, watching them.

"Drew Pierce," Peggy breathed. "How did he get here?"

"Martha!" the doctor exclaimed. "Why didn't you stay home?"

Elaine ran across the room and threw herself into the strange girl's arms—kissed her. "It's been six hours since I left you, Fred, but it seems like a century."

"That's her!" Baker shouted, thinking of the stomach pump. "That's the patient."

"Her?" repeated Peggy. "Now I know you're drunk. Calling Drew Pierce 'she,' or, rather, 'her'!"

She looked at him disgustedly, then started toward the hall, carefully going aside for Elaine and the strange girl. "It's a neat trick, Elaine. I never knew you had the nerve. Get ready Mr. Pierce. I'll be back in a moment like a flash."

She opened the bedroom door. The hinges squealed, then she screamed.

"George! George! Is he dead?"

Baker staggered toward her. He put his arm around her shoulder and guided her back into the hall. The doctor kneeled beside the sprawled body on the floor.

Baker halted at the door of another bedroom and looked back to see Elaine huddling fearfully in the arms of the stranger. The stranger was walking slowly, almost gliding, toward the door of the room where the body lay. He waited to see what would happen.

The strange smile was still curving the unknown's lips. And there was no change when she looked into the room and saw the wizened doctor working over Manning.

But Elaine looked, started violently. She looked up into the face of the stranger, peered closely as though searching for something, then pressed closer.

Baker turned away and helped Peggy into the extra bedroom.

When they were inside, Peggy's hands gripped the lapels of his coat. "George," she whispered hoarsely, "did you kill him?"

He stared at her.

"Tell me! Tell me!" she insisted, still in a low voice and trying to shake him. "Did you kill Fred? Quick! Maybe we can get away! We'll rip out the phones and disable all the cars but ours. Maybe we could make it to an airport and get out of the country."

His lips twitched as he held her away from him. "Listen, baby! I didn't kill anybody. I think your 'Drew Pierce' did! But don't you say a thing. There's something queer about 'him,' or 'her,' and they might pin it on me. You keep quiet, see?"

Peggy was quieter and looking at him with penetrating eyes. Then she said: "You needn't be afraid to tell me, if you did. I hated the dirty little stinker. I knew Patricia and why he married Elaine."

"Does Elaine know?"

"Certainly. 'Friends' saw to it that she found out. But she didn't care."

Baker hesitated. It was as though he were afraid to ask a question, but at last he forced it out: "What did she look like?"

"Pretty—red hair, very fair skin with just enough freckles on her nose to make her pert. Oh, *she* was all right! And she had sense enough to see that Fred was a heel."

She stopped speaking and stared at Baker.

"What's the matter, George? You look sick!"

"I am! God! I wonder what it is."

"Wonder what what is?"

"That . . that thing! To you it looks like Drew Pierce, the actor; to me it looks like you; to Elaine it is Fred; and the doctor thinks it is someone by the name of Martha."

"George! Haven't you been drinking?" There was an hysterical note in Peggy's voice as though she hoped he would say "Yes."

"No! I haven't had a drop since three o'clock this afternoon."

She believed; she had to. There was no reason for him to lie, and she knew he hadn't. Something very like an unconscious whimper came from deep within her throat.

Baker looked down at her. Her rouge showed like two bloody spots on her bloodless cheeks. There was a whiteness around her mouth that was only accented by the vividness of her lips. He drew her closer.

"Let's get out of here," she begged. "Let's go back to town."

"We can't, honey," he said, and kissed her. "That thing, whatver it is, is deadly. It killed Manning!"

"What do we care?" she demanded. "He was a dirty little rat. It served him right!"

"Peggy! He's dead!"

"What difference does that make? It doesn't make

him a better man. I hope he roasts in hell!"

"Peggy! You're hysterical! You need rest."

"I do not! I want to leave here!"

He forced her toward the bed. "You lie down and rest for a while. I'll figure out some way to fix Peggy-Pierce-Fred-Martha, and then we'll leave."

She fought him, silently, determinedly. But in the end his superior strength prevailed. She was on the bed. He held her hands so she couldn't scratch. In a moment she ceased struggling and lay still, glaring up at him.

"Listen, baby," he pleaded. "We can't let that thing loose on the world. It isn't human! I know it—feel it!"

He waited, searching her face to see if he had made any impression. Her lips trembled and she caught the lower one between her white teeth. Her eyes filled with tears. She turned her head away.

"I want to go away."

He watched her. He knew the depths of her fear. Only the memory of those cold, searching mists made him resolve to stay and kill the thing. But that was no reason why Peggy should have to stay!

"The doctor will be going back before long. You can go with him."

"I want you to come"

"I have to stay," he burst out.

"I won't go unless you do."

He released her hands and stood up. "We'll see," he said. "Anyway, you must rest for a while."

She said nothing as he went out the door and closed it silently behind him. Then he stopped short. Peggy was standing in the hall.

It took a moment for him to realize that he wasn't seeing Peggy, but the stranger. Then he smiled bitterly and let his hand fall from the doorknob. The stranger smiled, too. And moved toward him.

It pressed close to his side and attempted to lift his arm over its shoulders. He shuddered and pushed it away. It staggered across the hall and brought up against the wall with a thump, and regarded him with sorrowful eyes.

Baker felt conscience-stricken. That bump must have hurt. The eyes were still on him, gentle and reproachful. He went to its side and helped it to its feet. Together they started down the hall toward the living room. His arm was around the stranger.

They came to the door of the room he had occupied with Peggy before the stranger had come, the room to which he had carried the stranger and in which it had killed Manning. He looked inside. Manning's body was gone. There was nothing unusual about its being gone; the doctor had probably moved it. But the fact seemed for a moment to thrust back the mists that were surrounding his mind.

With sudden determination he shoved the stranger from him and into the empty room. Then he slammed the door shut and tried to lock it. Futilely he cursed the maker of the lock. There was no key! It could only be locked from the inside!

He held the door tight while the stranger wailed, "me out! Please!"

After a moment he wondered why the thing didn't try the lock, try to pull the door open. It never touched the door; it only pleaded to be freed.

He realeased the doorknob and stepped back, waiting. Still the stranger didn't open the door. Baker grinned. Was it possible that it didn't know anything about doors; had never seen one before? Not if it were a creature of this Earth, he decided. But was there any proof, or even indication, that the stranger was of this planet? Might it not be a wanderer from some other hellish sphere?

He shivered and hurried to the living room, through it to the library, and opened the table drawer. A small caliber automatic lay atop some papers. He took it out, checked to see that it was loaded, then shoved it into his pocket.

When he went back to the living room the doctor had returned and was bending over a body on the floor near the fireplace that he hadn't noticed when he had passed through the room a moment ago. The doctor heard him and looked up. His wrinkled face and scrawny neck seemed to personify disapproval.

"See here!" he commanded. "What's going on here? I no sooner get one stiff into the car than I come back and find another one waiting for me. Why?"

He scrambled to his feet and stalked over to Baker like a bantam rooster. Baker tried to go around him, but the little dried-up fellow quickly blocked him. Baker looked down into the wizened doctor's eyes.

"Think it over for a while," he invited. "Maybe you'll come to the conclusion that they died."

"I think they were poisoned, and in my capacity as coroner I intend to hold post-mortems. I'm gonna warn the sheriff to keep an eye on you to see that you don't try to pull a sneak."

"O. K., go to it," Baker agreed. "But if you'll wait a while, we'll go to town with you."

The little doctor peered at him intently, then turned away to maneuver the additional body out to his car. It was characteristic of his insolent independence that he asked no help of anyone.

Baker watched him lift Elaine in his skinny arms and go out the door. Then his hand closed over the pistol in his pocket. He started forward again, then halted when Peggy came to meet him.

She was quieter, more self-composed. She smiled up at him wanly.

"Well?" she asked.

He pulled the pistol from his pocket. She looked at it curiously. He waited for her to speak, but she said nothing.

"That ought to take care of it," he offered grimly.

She hesitated, still staring at the pistol. "But it's so small," she objected at last.

"It'll blow her insides right out her back. That is, if it has any insides," he amended doubtfully. "We've never seen it as it really is, and I'm glad we haven't. We see only what we want to see—our ideal!" Then he

grinned. "And you don't see me, do you? I ought to take you to court for that. It's incompatibility. Any judge would agree."

He waited for the answering smile he was trying to arouse, but none came.

"But, don't you think you ought to make sure?" she asked, seriously. "If you don't kill her, she'll follow us. Why don't you use fire? Fire is clean, and hot."

He considered. "Peggy, that's a good idea! There are some five-gallon tins of gasoline in the garage. I'll get one. You keep an eye on that cocky little doctor while I go out the side door and bring one back."

He shoved the gun back into his pocket and ran to the garage. Then returned at a slower pace with a five-gallon can of the inflammable fluid under his arm. At the door he halted, listening. He could hear nothing, so he went in.

Peggy was at the front window, watching the doctor.

"O. K.?" he asked.

She nodded and stayed at the window while he went to the kitchen for a can opener. It took a few minutes to cut the top away and expose the liquid. He looked up anxious about the doctor.

Peggy was looking at him, and she nodded reassuringly. He looked back at the gasoline and at his arms where it had slopped.

"Peggy!" he called. "You'll have to help. Do you think you can?"

She came to him immediately, and he felt a surge of admiration for her courage. Then he outlined his plan:

"I can't touch it off because I got it all over me. I'll carry it to the door and set it on the floor. You carry a lighted candle and stay a couple of feet away from me. I'll swing the door open and take a couple of shots at it for luck, then I'll kick the gasoline over so it'll go into the room, and jump back out of the way. Then you throw the candle into the room to touch it off."

"All right," Peggy said, and Baker admired her calm determination.

He lifted the can and started down the hall. Again the mists were swirling around him. The stranger must realize her peril and was trying to kill him before he could injure her. He staggered and the can of gasoline almost slipped from his hands. It splashed over his clothes.

Then he straightened and grasped the can tighter. He had to! He must! That horrible thing must not be turned loose on the world.

He set the can down in front of the door and put his left hand on the knob. In his right he held the pistol. He hoped that the thing hadn't discovered how to open doors. If it had—well, their scheme was wrecked.

He twisted the knob and opened the door, silently. He looked in. It was on the bed. He flung the door open—fired two shots at it.

And he hit it, he knew. For it reared upward in the bed, arched its body stiffly with pain.

Baker leaped back out of the way and the candle flew through the doorway and into the room. There was an explosive puff, then the room was a mass of flames. One scream came from the room and froze him with its anguish.

Then he and Peggy were stumbling down the hall and out of the house. The doctor had just finished his task and was coming toward the door. When he saw them he halted and turned back. Baker knew that he hadn't heard the shots and was glad that the pistol was of small caliber.

Baker stood at the side of the car, looking back at the house. Flames were beginning to flicker at the windows. He was eager to get going.

"Come on, come on. Let's go!" he said impatiently.

"Keep your shirt on," the wizened doctor advised. "Is you wife staying here? Here, Martha, you sit in the middle. It will be warmer." He slapped the seat beside him.

Baker stared as Peggy got in.

"That will be nice," she said. "Warmer! And I've been so cold."

The pistol was still in Baker's pocket. He wanted to snatch it out and shoot—he willed himself to. But he climbed meekly into the car and sat down. He was enthralled by the stranger!

His face was serene—expressionless. But inside was a boiling mess of fear, hate, and grief. He knew now that he had been deluded into opening the wrong door.

THE END.

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THE HEXER

BY H. W. GUERNSEY

He had a highly developed sense of humor, which might have been all right. But his highly developed magic — !

Oxboro *Enquirer*, June 2. —at the departmental hearing on the Kramer case, Patrolman Brian Daugherty insisted stubbornly on his original version of the odd affair. Off duty and in plain clothes, he was walking home. He was nearing the deserted intersection of Dale Avenue and Fourth Street shortly after ten o'clock last Monday evening when a man "come helling around the corner." Asked what he meant by "helling," Daugherty explained, "Like mad, like a banshee. He was traveling like a bat out of— I mean he was really traveling."

Commissioner Hopkins asked: "Are you familiar with banshees, Daugherty?"

Without cracking a smile, Daugherty said: "My old lady told me about a couple of them she saw in Ireland, but I never saw one myself."

Mayor Anderson said impatiently: "Let's get ahead."

Daugherty recited, "Another man busts around the corner almost as fast as the first one who I was shagging."

"Got eyes in the back of your head?"

"I heard him. The first guy was running light; the second guy was running heavy."

"The second guy. That would be Heinrich Kramer?"

"Yessir; only I didn't know who he was then, though. He come holling around the corner hanging onto his head. Like this." Daugherty demonstrated, grabbing his head like a basketball and making a face. "He looked nuts, with his eyes glaring that way. I had my gun out, and when he saw it he stopped. I asked him what was his hurry, and he said his head. 'My head,' he says, just like that. The guy he was chasing was gone already, so I went for Kramer, just walking easy toward him. Right away he ducked back around the corner, and when I got there, he was halfway down the block already and picking up speed all the time."

Jan Kupra, representing the *Enquirer*, asked: "Aren't you pretty handy with your gun, Daugherty?"

"I'm a good shot," Daugherty admitted modestly. him when he was over a block away."

"You just took aim and shot him. If you'd killed him, it would have been murder."

Daugherty got red in the face, and said: "He'll tell you so himself. First I yelled him to halt and he—"

"You yelled him to halt?" Kupra mimicked.

"Get along with this," the mayor ordered.

"I yelled him to halt, and he kept on going. Then I fired over his head, and he still kept on going, so I brung the aim down a little bit."

"And you got him," said Kupra. "And he skinned his nose and his knees, and might have cracked his skull and died, and it would still be murder. Do you like to shoot men in the back, Daugherty?"

"Shut up!" Mayor Anderson shouted, "or I'll throw you right out of here myself!"

"I was shooting for his legs," Daugherty said, "but the way he was running, I had to aim higher. He ain't hurt much, except he ain't comfortable sitting down. I thought he was trying to hold up that other guy, and I had to stop him.

"When I got to him, chief, he was cussing around like I'd have to throw him in the klink if there was anybody listening to him but me. He was calling me names that—"

"Never mind. Mr. Kramer is noted for his vocabulary outside of Oxboro."

"Yessir. Then he started talking wild about his head again. He said that guy he was chasing done something to his head. I asked him what, and he clammed up. I took him to the hospital on account of that little puncture, and that's all, sir."

Heinrich Kramer, of course, is the bard of Oxboro. He is as well known for his several great novels as for his own almighty opinion of them classing himself with Hardy, Maugham and others. He has long been considered the leader of Oxboro's café society. It was ascertained by police that on Monday evening Kramer the Great was drinking in the exclusive Number 400 and holding forth to companions, when he was annoyed by a stranger staring at him and chuckling. Kramer made a comment to his friends about the stranger, abruptly clapped his hands to his head and knocked over a table on his way to reach the man who was staring at him. The man got up hurriedly and left, with Kramer in chase.

Mr. Kramer has confined himself to his home, refusing to be interviewed, refusing in fact to bring charges against Patrolman Daugherty.

"There's no sense in it; it's whacky," Kupra said. "What's all this business about his head? There was nothing wrong with his head except for its size. You can't go around shooting prominent citizens indiscriminately, Daugherty."

Mayor Anderson said: "I warned you, Kupra; you're only here to listen. Now GET OUT!"

The mayor screamed the way he does whenever he gets the chance, and everybody in Oxboro knows how he gets grape-fruit-purple in the face and sticks his hammy ears out, and hikes his shoulders up so that it looks as though he hasn't got any neck.

The mayor then told Daugherty, "You, too, patrolman. Get out, and take your banshees along with you. Get back to your post, and next time don't be too handy with your gun."

Why the famous Heinrich Kramer acted as he did, is a mystery. But he chose to run when arrested, and he didn't stop when Daugherty fired a warning shot.

The only description of the man whom Kramer was chasing is that he was slight, elderly but athletic, and well-dressed in a dark suit, black topcoat, hat and shoes. As yet no clue to this individual's identity has been found—

A few days later in his column, "The Banana Stem," Jan Kupra wrote:

> There is something funny going on in Oxboro. The secret won't last long, because the mortality among secrets shaves one hundred per cent pretty close. For the time being, certain people are acting with suspicious furtiveness; they jump up and beat it out of restaurants while you're talking to them, snub old friends on the street, and some of them stick inside their houses as though there's a plague on the loose. Maybe it's a secret society, and maybe it's political, huh? If you don't think strange habits and unnatural actions and secret plots are dangerous, remember what happened to Heinrich Kramer. According to the way they're behaving, we could name a few names who belong in the bughouse down the river. Names you've seen in print before, too—

The streetcars in Oxboro are way longer and wider and more powerful than the trolleys in New York. They are painted bright canary-yellow, and the seating accommodations consist of lengthwise seats in front and rear, cross-wise seats in the middle. In the cross-wide seats passengers look at the backs of heads and study dandruff, coiffures, and types of ears. In the lengthwise seats passengers sneak looks at pretty legs, succumb to the hypnotic interest of blemishes and deformities, and shorten the ride with successive mental sneers at all those hopeless, idiotic specimens of humanity lined up across the aisle.

Kupra owned an expensive sedan which he used for pleasure; he took the streetcar to the shop and elsewhere during the day, because it looked democratic; besides, being a born snoop, he never tired of studying faces, strange or familiar. He liked to analyze, to sift all the fascinating details which make up a countenance, to take a face apart and put it back together again like God. An old hand at the game, he was able to say, "That man has the eyes of a murderer"; or "Well-dressed as he is, the man's ears are more animal than human." On the 7th of June, Kupra was riding in the rear section of a streetcar on the Hill Park line, and practicing industriously his refined, private brand of cannibalism.

The sky was all blue, and the sun was shining particularly on Oxboro. Some of the green lawns and boulevards were splashed with dandelions in beds, like microspores of pollen each expanded to giant size. Having finished his covert inspection of Passengers Number 1 and 2, Kupra went to work with his eyes and mind on the third individual from the left. Kupra read from left to right.

This person was an old man of perhaps seventy winters. Whatever his stature was in its prime, he had diminished to gnomelike proportions. Height: five-feet-four; weight: a hundred to a hundred and ten pounds; white hair, fashionably barbered. He was a neat person, and sat with his knees close together, his spine straight, his slim, girlish hands folded quite composedly in his lap. His necktie was correct with his shirt, whose collar encircled his slender throat with accurate, soft dimensions. He wore a dark-gray hat, a suit of hard gray worsted that was immaculately pressed and tailored, sheer socks that were snug around his ankles, shapely shoes which were narrow and short and pointed, painstakingly carved out of solid ebony and polished with oil. His lips were compressed to a thin line, and he was so smoothly shaven that his face was a girlishly fresh cameo. His ears were Puckish, close to his head. Kupra observed the observant stillness of the stranger's eyes, and afterward he could never remember what color they were. All told, the dear little old man who was riding on the seat across the aisle was a diminutive aristocrat whose lips smiled subtly about something.

Kupra looked along his nose with great dubiety, then slowly raised his face to the varnished, hooded architecture of the ceiling, just to make sure; his nose was a yard long, or longer. He sighted long it, after the manner of a hunter centering on a deer with a .351 rifle.

None of the other passengers observed the casual lifting of his eyebrows.

Kupra brought his attention down again and the attenuated schnozzle wabbled elastically. When he turned his head too suddenly, his newly acquired deformity wagged obscenely, like the tail of a hairless dog. He lifted his hand to his face with a careless gesture, and made sure that the long, nude proboscis was there. It was there, all right, equal in length to four or five frankfurters joined end to end, about a pound in weight since it was boneless. It was

his own secret, obviously invisible to all the other passengers. Save perhaps one. He stared hard at the beautifully tailored old pixie across the aisle.

He was shaking with some private mirth. When Kupra's eyes returned to him, he rang the bell abruptly and reached the back platform as the car arrived at an intersection. The back gates opened and he got off, and was gone at a brisk, catfooting walk after a glance through the windows at the stricken Kupra.

The broomstick of nose was the old man's doing. It was he who had escaped from Heinrich Kramer, and Kramer had been chasing him because he had made the Oxboro bard's big head a private actuality. And now he had hexed Kupra, hanging a pole of snout on his face, giving the keyhole-peeper a branch of anatomy which he could really snoop with.

Appalled by the indecency of the fate that had overtaken him, Kupra turned his head to look out the window at the green lawns riding by and sort of get rid of the whole idea. There was a man sitting beside him, and the gun barrel of nose batted him across the Adam's apple.

"Glob!" exclaimed the man, and took hold of his throat. He glared suspiciously at the columnist, who sat with hands folded, staring innocently across the way. Frowning with puzzlement and worry, the man kept swallowing experimentally and gently massaging his gozzle.

As for Kupra, he refrained from stroking the pain out of the marvelous beak where its architecture had bent across his fellow-passenger's neck.

For the duration of the ride he kept the phantom schnozzle gently clamped between his knees, anchoring it out of harm's way and pondering the immaculately dressed old Hexer's malicious talent.

He got off at Ashland, his street. Big elms were spaced along the boulevard, and the warm shadow under their canopy of foliage was conducive to thought and experimentation. With no citizens in sight, he explored the ghostly sniffer from end to end as though playing a dirge on a flute, and there was not the least doubt about its authenticity. It was quite a quandary to be in.

A housewife interrupted the chore of sweeping off her porch to watch the rapt, sleepwalking exercises which Kupra was doing with his arms.

"Hello, Mr. Kupra," she called, in the tone of a person addressing a drunk. "Is something the matter?"

"Just exercising, Mrs. Jefferson," he lied resignedly. "You know how your arms get stiff."

He continued on his way with his hands in his pockets, shaking his head slowly with dull disbelief. His nose wagged; it had the same flexibility as its length in garden hose. He was the proprietor of a phenomenon which would baffle surgery. No wonder Kramer had run from Daugherty; if he had divulged what the Hexer had done to his head, the authorities might have consigned him to the nuthouse down the river. On Kupra it was a terrible punishment to visit for his crimes of reporting. With a stroke of his eye the old man had done it, the mischievous devil.

When he reached his number, he observed two cars parked at the curb, empty. He had guests as usual. He had loaned his keys a couple of times, and the girls had had duplicates made; he hadn't got around to having the locks changed; the girls were sources of information as to who was having babies, when, what guy or gal was breaking up whose home, and so on.

There were five people sitting in his living room, drinking Collinses made out of his fancy gin. Morosely he looked around at Johnny Pollet, Jeannette Shires, Dave Martinson, Anne Pryor and Betty Turner.

"Want a drink?" Anne asked.

"Yeah, will you mix me one?" he asked. taking a shower; I'm all sticky."

Perspiring and shaken because of what the Hexer had done to him, he closed his bedroom door, stripped and stepped under the shower for a quick one. He forgot about the nose until the last, soaped it then and wagged it under the spray to rinse it. The magnitude of the unmerciful disaster which had overtaken him numbed his wits; he moved like an automaton, stepping out of the tub and toweling himself. He made a complete change of clothing even to shoes. As he selected a new shirt from a bureau drawer and got into it, he hung a new necktie temporarily on his bugaboo of nose, about midway along. In the mirror, the necktie looked as though it were suspended in midair. In spite of its stick-out reality, the nose didn't reflect.

He closed the drawer, fortunately not hard because his nose got caught in the crack. He clawed the drawer open. Pain streamed up the schnozzle into his skull and nearly blew off the top of his head. Shuddering, he screwed his eyes up; tears trickled, tickling, down his olfactory extension.

Dabbing at his eyes, he gained control of himself and joined the chattering party in the living room. A drink had been made for him.

When Anne tendered the glass she performed in a most peculiar manner. Instead of turning around and going back to her chair in a normal way, she backed warily with a very odd smile, passing a hand behind her and making a gesture as though catching something up. Kupra, who had held his head aside with an absent-minded expression to keep his nose out of the way, stared speculatively at her while she smoothed her dress with singular extravagance and drew her legs up onto a window seat. Anne was a brunette, choicely rounded and graceful; she had the right height and heft and resiliency of anatomy, and cultivated a pronounced ability to pose. She was feline in her exact graduations of movement, and her voluptuousness was contained this afternoon in a handkerchief-linen dress opaqued with a satin slip. The wrinkling across the hips and in the skirt behind did not diminish her attractiveness, and she didn't need to worry about showing an amount of knee and a moongleam of thigh, because she was among friends.

Wondering why she acted as though she thought he would give her a kick if she turned her back on him.

Kupra went to a chair and sat on its arm, keeping the lengthy quiver of his nose away from his drink so that he wouldn't knock it out of his hand himself.

"Well, what's the important word?" he asked at large.

Around the room he got serial answers, "Nothing happens," "Mh-mh. Hm-m-m," "I don't know a thing," "What have *you* got?" and "There's nobody in town, but us."

"Oh, you just dropped in," Kupra commented. He tried his drink, and it was pretty good for a girl's work. No taste of gin. He arrived at the conclusion that there was no gin in the drink, and repaired to the kitchen, returning to hear a lot of conversation about nothing going on. Anne was highly decorative and posey, and was strolling about for effect as usual. Kupra observed that now and then she gave her hips an inexplicable galvanic twist as though she were muscling an appendage, like a cat. A cat she was, of course, and eventually someone stepped on her tail. She let out an agonized caterwaul, grabbed behind her and snatched to her breast the injured member, which, of course, was just as invisible as Kupra's nose.

Everyone jumped, and Kupra asked: "What was that for?"

"Why, nothing," she said breathlessly. She forced a laugh. "I just wanted to see you all jump."

"A fine sense of humor you've got," Kupra remarked. "Don't do that again; it's too hot to jump."

He let the party go on as it would, just listening. Being host was never any exertion to him, because if anyone wanted a drink the person made it himself. He kept an eye on Anne, remembering the torment in the screech she had let out. When he had a chance he told her: "I want to talk to you."

She agreed, and they drifted unobserved into the bedroom of the bungalow. When he had closed the door he asked: "What's on your mind, Anne? Come on, what's the matter?"

"I don't know what you mean. Honestly, I haven't got anything for you. Please." She was out of breath.

He stared at her, and there was fright in her eyes. "Maybe nothing I can print," he suggested, "but something else?"

"Always the snoop," she bantered. "It might be something very personal, none of your business at all, you know."

"I can almost guess what it is," he hinted.

"You couldn't possibly."

"Listen, Anne," he urged. "Haven't I always been a mommie and poppie to you? Have I ever done you dirty? Gimme."

"All right; it's just this. "Well," she groped, "I . I think I'm going crazy. Really bughouse, I mean."

"What makes you think you're going bughouse?"

"I've got a tail," she said shakily.

"What kind of a tail?"

"A cat's tail. I mean I really have," she said in a rush of words. "It was trailing on the rug, and Dave Martinson sank his heel into it."

"Well, I'll be—" Kupra began, but Anne looked as though she were going to cry. He saw her wet eyes and said hastily: "Don't worry, Anne; you're no battier than I am. Just a minute, though. If you've got a tail, how do you get a dress on over it?"

"I don't know," she said, with a shrug of despair. "It just works that way."

"Line of cleavage," he muttered.

She turned, and he made a pass at the supposedly empty air. She said: "There."

Rooted to the base of her spine was indubitably the tail of a cat, its proportions proper for her size. It was covered with fur, and flexible, and she could twitch it, having full muscular control over it. He let it slip through his fingers to the end, ascertaining that it was a generous five feet long. Experimentally he tugged, and she was compelled to back up protestingly.

"It's there beyond a doubt," he said. "Now guess what I've got. A nose." He had her stand just so, and gave her a gentle bat across the side of the head.

With awe, after feeling along its length, Anne said: "For heaven's sake." She laughed uncertainly.

"I guess," he said sardonically, "that he wanted to bring home the idea that I was sticking my nose into other people's business, like the feline streak in your case."

"I'm not feline."

"You've given me some pretty catty gossip."

"But how can such a thing happen? It's utterly wild!"

"Very utterly. When did this tail grow on you?"

"Just a couple of days ago. I was having cocktails with a couple of the girls down at the Casino, and we were chatting—"

"Cutting each other's throats, and snickering at your friends, maybe telling a nasty story about some Hollywood actress because you're not in Hollywood."

"Gee, you've got a mean tongue," she said. "Anyhow, all at once it happened. Umph. As quick as that. I left right away, of course, as soon as I was sure. I'm positive the girls didn't suspect anything, because they had engagements and were in a hurry, too."

"I wonder what he did to them."

"What did who do?"

"Hoodoo is right," Kupra cracked. "Did you happen to notice a pink-faced shrimp of an old man anywhere in the Casino? A skinny old geezer all barbered and manicured and tailored up."

"Oh! He was all alone at the next table, and he bought all our drinks for us. He looked charming, but I wondered if he wasn't senile and thinking he was going to get something out of it."

"Rest your mind. That old monkey is the one responsible for this. He got me on the streetcar only a little while ago on the way uptown."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes!"

"Why, that devilish little mummy!"

"Sure. He gave Henry Kramer a head the size of a

beer barrel; Kramer was quick on the trigger and chased the buzzard who hexed him up like that. Henny almost caught the old guy's coat tails."

"Kramer was a fool to run."

"Sure he was. But are you going to go around advertising the fur job he did on you?"

"You won't tell on me, will you?" she begged. "It's so devastatingly ridiculous."

"As long as you don't give me away about my nozzle."

They regarded each other strickenly, and with the baffled compassion of companions in misery.

"I wonder if the condition is permanent," she hazarded. There was a wail in her inflection. "People are beginning to think I'm queer. I have to positively sprint into a room so that I don't get a door closed on my tail. And I get tired of keeping it curled in the air all the time so that it doesn't get stepped on. Besides, it's nervous; it's got a tic in it that's driving me out of my mind. And its gets matted the way fur does and feels terrifically uncomfortable. I'm combing it all the time. And even with an electric drier, after I give it a bath, it's ages before it's all fluffy again."

"I just closed a drawer on my beak when I changed my shirt," Kupra chimed in somberly. "When I go to bed tonight I guess I'll have to lie on my back and do a juggling act. And I never was able to sleep on my back."

"You know," said Anne, "I think there's something wrong with Jeannette and Betty, too. They've been acting as though they've eaten a goblin apiece."

"There's something screwy about Martinson, too."

After kissing Anne, just to see whether it could be done with the handicap of his nasal equipment, Kupra eased open the latch of the bedroom door and looked through the crack. They rejoined the party which had formed through the usual happenstance. People who had nothing important to do in hot weather, collecting in comfortable surroundings in which someone had snitched a key—Betty or Anne or both.

The drinking went on through the afternoon past twilight. Kupra found things out. Across the room, Dave Martinson was getting himself soused. He was a lawyer, somber in appearance, dark and devious in the ways of his mind. His forehead was smooth, white, as unblemished as a boy's. Absently, he was tracing with a forefinger an invisible mark, a certain letter which the Hexer had branded there above his eyes. The habit of tracing the letter revealed it in pinkish outline. Martinson caught Kupra staring, and the lanky lawyer jerked his hat on, sat staring morosely at the rug, inevitably to raise his finger to his forehead again.

Jeannette Shires spent a couple of hours a day on her marvelous complexion; she had gardenia-petal skin, its purity accented by magnificent black hair in a carved coiffure of gleaming curls. During the evening she got Kupra aside and asked to borrow his razor.

The Hexer had got her. He had given her a heavy black beard, and she had to shave twice a day.

That made it five out of six. If this group was representative of the town, the Hexer had already distributed his wares among five-sixths of the citizens of Oxboro.

Keeping his eyes skinned for the next few days, Kupra found plenty of evidence that such was the case, that the Hexer had spared very few in squeegeeing the town. Some of the deeds were good; most appeared to have been committed with the most greedy malice.

There was a certain loud-mouthed cop, notorious for his insolence of manner in writing out tickets, who had mule's ears. From the length of the stroke, for he was continually feeling them to see if they were still there, it could be determined that they were a full eighteen inches of botheration.

The best-dressed man in town started growing flowers back of his ears. The narcissus scent was unmistakable. A listener could detect the snap of stems when he picked them daily.

The meanest man in town had a face like a saint. Overnight a caprice of paralysis struck his benign countenance into an iron mask of virulent detestation of the whole human race.

And so on down the line.

Mostly, the Hexer avoided repetition in his works, indicating interest in his profession, or hobby. Not everyone was affected by the potent gleam of that gray eye, but his goal was not necessarily a hundred per cent. Too, it was presumable that only he could take back his gifts; widely as he plied his mischief, however, none of his victims saw him more than once; he returned no more, deaf in his mad glee to prayers in whatever humility or rage pronounced. What he did he would not undo.

All Kupra found to do was hope futilely that his particular curse would wear off; while the phantom schnozzle might yield to surgery, he had the dark conviction that another one would spontaneously sprout. At the typewriter, when he knocked off his daily column for the *Enquirer*, he kept on printing capital letters, quotation marks and the like on his beak. Sometimes he wondered whether mass insanity had hit town. Otherwise he wondered where the little old man had come from, and where the little old man had gone.

He certainly did his cussedest in Oxboro.

Oxboro *Enquirer*, June 25; Public Notices. WANTED: Works on black magic, secret doctrines, hypnotism, Tibetan mysteries, ancient lore, occult and mystic sciences, and the evil eye, with emphasis on lifting spells. Premium prices paid. Phone Jan Kupra, *Enquirer*, or Oxboro 2748.

THE END

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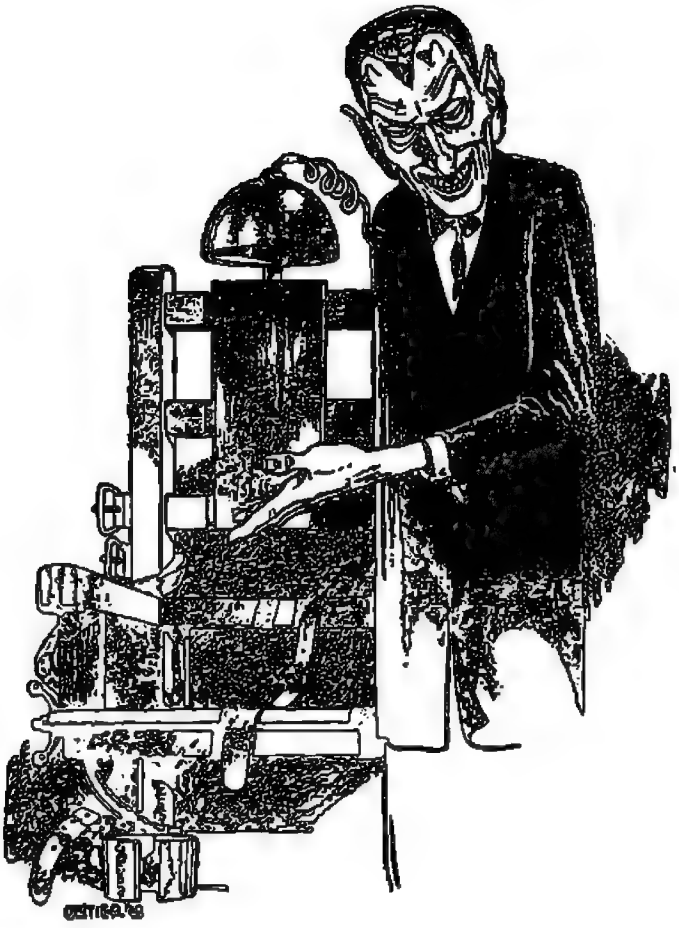
THE SUMMONS

BY DON EVANS



A uniquely fine piece of sheer writing.

Dunstan Raynor paused just before reaching the heavy oak door at the end of the small passage. For a moment he thought someone had called him. It was almost as though a restraining hand had been laid upon his shoulder. He peered earnestly about him in the half-light of the narrow space. Then he thought there was something he had forgotten to do. But it was not quite like that, either.

It was more like something he had had to do at the urge of some forgotten memory, and had started to do, when other events had intruded, leaving a sense of unfinished but urgent business. It was the sort of thing he had known he would forget and might have tied a string about his finger in order to remember. But there was no string on his finger any more than there was a hand on his shoulder.

He looked back the way he had come in some puzzlement, his dark eyes lost in doubt. He passed a well-kept hand over his glossy black hair and his long face, of almost satanic beauty, frowned in utter mystification. It was not the first time he had experienced the strange feeling. It was just like an inaudible voice coaxing him, begging him, pleading with him to do something, or go somewhere. Or, as though he had unwittingly fallen within the power of some hypnotic mind, some superior will, that was trying to bend him to its dictates.

There was a distinct feeling that he was being summoned. It was weak, however, like the voice on a badly tuned radio. It was not quite clear and distinguishable, yet, but growing more so at each occurrence.

After a moment, the feeling passed. He was just about to go on, when vague words came to him. Glancing up, he saw the black square of a ventilator in the ceiling. Somewhere in the rooms above, people were talking. Men's voices were audible but muted strangely by the acoustics of the shaft.

"Come on, now; you might as well tell us. You gave him the poison, didn't you? The druggist identifies you. The doctor says there was no such prescription. *You wanted him out of the way, because you love his wife!*"

Staring up at the dark hole, Dunstan Raynor could have sworn that someone was up there looking down, speaking the words directly at him. He wondered if it had been some strange trick of sound that had brought him vague words of command from up there—words which he had heard, without conscious attention, and which he had applied to himself while thinking of other matters. But these words were quite different in effect. He felt no compulsion about answering.

He wondered what was going on up there.

The heavy oak door swung open as he approached and closed behind him. Regarding the great marble hall with

pleasure, he crossed the smooth flagstones on noiseless feet, his slender, athletic figure moving with poise and assurance. There was a light of glad anticipation on his face.

A fountain was playing in the center of the hall. A circle of white pillars rose high about him. Beyond the gurgling fountain, with its thread of water persistently forcing its futile way upward, began the enormous stairs that curved upward on either hand to meet above, before the tall stained-glass windows.

There was a tame lion wandering by the fountain in majestic solitude. It glanced at him and came over to lick his hand. He rubbed the hairy muzzle. Tame as a kitten. No doubt a great pet of the fellow who owned this place. And by the way, who does own it?—he asked himself.

There were vines moving in the breeze outside the stained-glass windows. They dappled the marble stairs and balustrade with a moving kaleidoscope of color born of the hot afternoon sun. About halfway up the right-hand stairs a statue of Minerva rested in a niche. The play of light and shadow across the grave stone face made her blush and wink as he passed. He mounted the stairs with a skipping grace and light heart.

In the broad corridor above, he was just about to enter a bronze door when there came a sudden patter of high heels.

Annabelle came from somewhere.

She was pulling on little white gloves and her face lit up with pleasure. His heart almost stopped as he turned toward her. She was glorious, so radiant, so vitally alive. Chestnut hair escaped in curls about her piquant face beneath the tight little red hat. Her eyes were soft and violet, like pansies. Her nose was too small, but all the more fascinating. Red lips were full and the lower one curled over; passionate little lips and selfish sometimes when she pouted, but adorable when she smiled. It was infectious, alluring, and disturbing. He wanted his arms about her. It hurt to know that he could not.

"Darling," she said in that silvery voice that gurgled with happiness and sometimes mischief, "it's been ages since I've seen you! Why don't you come oftener?"

He was suddenly diffident and ill at ease. "You know why," he said.

She looked at him levelly as though a challenge lay at the back of those wide violet orbs. Then her arms were around his neck, warm soft little arms that clung with surprising strength. He felt himself swaying as she looked deep into his soul and saw the manhood ebb from him like water from a leaky vessel. Little waves of intoxicating perfume enveloped him. He could not force his eyes from hers. His head seemed to whirl in delirium.

"Kiss me," she said coolly. It was not coaxing, it was not commanding. It was said in a matter-of-fact voice as if she knew that no power on earth could stop him.

He was troubled. "Annabelle, you know we must not," he objected, trembling.

Her small hands forced his head down. When his arms had gone around her hungrily, in spite of himself, and when his lips had found hers crushingly, while his heart pumped flames instead of blood and they seemed to be wafted aloft to some gay fiery realm of ecstasy, she broke away from him suddenly with a hard little laugh. She started off with a little skip, sending a smile of triumph over her shoulder.

He suddenly felt cheap. The same old Annabelle, lovely as a flower, always wanting to know if she could arouse those emotions in him and twist him about her finger. There was a profound conviction that she was like that with every desirable man, calling the devil to life, in perfect safety to herself, for mere sport. He had the dim feeling of harpies fluttering in the air of the hall as she departed swiftly.

He had a brief glimpse of a man waiting by the balustrade on the landing, looking toward them with a smirk. The man was short, a little paunchy and dressed in a tuxedo. He had diamonds in his shirtfront, was polished, cultivated, but gross and vulgar somehow. A golden toad. His eyes were too wide apart and inclined to pop. There were bags under them. There was a loose mouth, a double chin and lines of dissipation—but rich, filthy rich. His five-thousand-dollar speedster was probably waiting outside in the bright summer sun.

Dunstan turned toward the door again with a frown. The feeling of pleasant anticipation he had experienced while mounting the stairs was gone. He felt guilty. Bitter. He opened the door and paused on the threshold.

The tall, blond man in the invalid chair was still looking at him fondly. Dunstan's thoughts were in such a whirl that he had not been conscious of the interview. He must have uttered the few banalities that came unconsciously to his lips and got the brief meeting over. He was already leaving instead of entering.

"And say, old man, drop by the drugstore and get me some sleeping tablets like a good fellow, will you?" queried Alan with his pleasant smile. "Haven't slept a wink in four nights. It's demolishing, you know."

"Yes, yes," agreed Dunstan absently and went out, closing the door behind him.

Annabelle's kisses still burned his lips. It was unfair. And Alan so helpless. He frowned in ill-humor and went on, shaking his head.

"No. I must never tell them, must never tell anyone that her husband committed suicide because she was unfaithful."

He hurried down the short, gloomy corridor and took a narrow stairway that wound and twisted down, down, between cold stone walls. He came to a landing with a door on his left. Pausing at the sound of voices from beyond the door, he thought he recognized a deep voice speaking quietly, forcefully. The door was locked so he placed his ear furtively to the thin boards.

"Alienists for the State quite agree with those for the defense. We ask that the case be dropped on the grounds of obvious and hopeless insanity, and that the defendant be confined to a suitable institution for the remainder of his life."

"You can't do that!"

Dunstan Raynor whirled and peered into the darkness behind him at the answering remark, which had seemed to come from directly over his own shoulder.

"Who said that?" he demanded fiercely.

There was no reply, and he could see no one in the blackness. The voices from beyond the door had ceased. He went on down the remaining steps, much puzzled. The words were vaguely familiar as if it was something he had read somewhere a long time ago, but they had no particular significance at present.

A door gave out onto a dark alley, where naught was visible in the velvety gloom of midnight save a single electric globe beneath an arch some distance away. He made progress with difficulty. The alley was muddy and piled with boxes and rubbish. Beyond the arch was a narrow street, paved with cobblestones, where queer old buildings leaned drunkenly. He saw a gas lamp a block away throwing a feeble radiance over a faded front. He turned into a small door with leaded panes in the upper half.

The apothecary was a little man with round, red face and gray whiskers. He beamed as he turned to the laden shelves. There were bottles in all shapes and sizes—bottles of amber, red and green liquids, bottles with powders, and bottles with tablets.

"Nice day," observed the little man genially, like some Santa Claus in civilian dress, as he wrapped the small package.

But, as he handed it over the counter, he suddenly paused and drew back his hand. His eyes became surprised, alarmed, and then stern. He pointed an accusing finger at Dunstan and said excitedly:

"That's the man. He purchased the tablets."

"No. No," responded Dunstan in fright. "It wasn't that way at all."

He turned and ran for the door as the little man hopped over the counter like a flea. Outside, in cold darkness, he ran down first one narrow corridor and then another. Passageway and tunnels seemed endless. There were doors everywhere. After a while, he paused exhausted. The corridor he was in went on and on. It was painted a deadly dull gray, loathsome and horrible. Tired of wandering down strange passageways, he opened a door. The boards echoed hollowly under his feet as he passed through. It was another corridor of the same oppressive gray. There were more doors, but these doors were barred with iron.

An old woman came to the nearest door and stretched forth beseeching hands toward him. She had on some sort of coarse gray gown. Her matted hair fell in strings over her eyes. They stared and rolled, goggling at him wildly.

"It's better that way," she croaked. "Green, you know. Everybody does. Continue the going dreadfully. It's not often quite frequently, isn't it?"

With a start of horror, he recognized the place. There was a door farther down with the number fifteen over it. It was there they had put him. But not without a fight over it. He remembered the struggle he had had with three white-coated attendants.

Another door at the end of the passage opened, and a white-gowned figure came through. It was the blond German doctor he hated. The latter caught sight of him and raised an imperious finger.

"Here, you! What are you doing outside?"

"I'm not outside," he responded sullenly. "I'm in here."

"Of course, you're in here," said the doctor.

As the man started forward menacingly, Dunstan Raynor turned and ran blindly, stumblingly, in a panic, while footsteps echoed behind.

Turning the corner of a dingy, brick building, he saw steps leading downward. Stone steps. There was a sort of tunnel below. It was black as pitch but it offered sanctuary, and he hurried down. Anything to escape the strait jacket he knew he would be in again if the doctor caught him.

He bumped into a door. Opening it, he came out in the great hall with the fountain. Music was playing, and a great many people were laughing. It must be a fancy-dress ball. Here was a knight in armor dancing stiffly with a graceful ballet girl. There was a pirate with a Columbine on his arm. There was a short man with a hideous mask. A figure was a frog's head. A skeleton.

But something unusual was going on. A platform had been built between the two curving stairs. He saw Annabelle there all in white, and Benny Westcott, the golden toad, in formal dress. Confetti was raining down upon them. They were being married.

He slouched forward bitterly and looked on. She would, he thought. And upstairs, poor twisted Alan was waiting to take those tablets. Not the one that would produce peaceful sleep, but the dozen or more that would put him out of all this. If these people only knew what was going to happen they would not laugh and be so gay. Or would they? But he knew what was going to happen! God! If he had only known in time.

The couple were married now and being congratulated. They looked over and saw him. Dunstan started and flushed red. A white-hot anger shook him.

The golden toad was *grinning*.

Westcott simpered like the cat that ate the canary. There was even a smile lurking in Annabelle's eyes as she regarded him. Then she came hurrying toward him.

"Darling!" she cooed. "I think it was perfectly marvelous, what you did. Oh! It was taking horrible chances. And all for me! I love you, Dunsy."

She would have kissed him, but he turned and fled. So, she thought she had driven him to do it for love of her! And the grinning toad was enjoying the joke. They were laughing at him. That's what hurt.

Making his way down a long hallway, he came to a black door. There was a thin man all in sober black beside the door. The man's face was cadaverous and gloomy, but that might be a mask, too. He seemed

kindly and opened the door politely for Dunstan to pass through.

The walls were all in plain black. There was a small platform by the farther wall and on it a huge square chair with heavy wires connected to it. There was a copper helmet, armbands, and legbands. There were heavy switches on the wall to one side.

The man was standing by the chair. He smiled politely and motioned for Dunstan to have a seat.

"Get in," he said. "It only takes a minute."

His smile seemed to grow evil, wolfish.

"Now look here," replied Dunstan severely. "This has gone far enough. I tell you I didn't do it. He took the tablets himself. How was I to know he wanted them for that purpose?"

Alan was there, too, standing quietly in one corner. He was no longer in the wheel chair but was standing straight and strong as before the accident.

"Sorry, old man," he said. "If I'd known they would blame you, I never would have done it that way."

The other man leered at Dunstan. "But it's too late to tell them," he pointed out. "No one would believe you, now. You're stark, raving mad, you see. Your testimony is worthless."

"You should have told them why I did it," added Alan quietly. "It wasn't worth it, old man."

"I wouldn't change it if I could," said Dunstan fervently. "And they're trying to get me back. I've felt it a dozen times, lately. Each time it is stronger. But I won't go back. Do you think I'd stand for that slimy little toad, Westcott, thinking I killed you so that I could marry Annabelle, when she married *him* instead? I tell you, he *grinned* at me."

"Get in," interrupted the other man impatiently.

"No!" shouted Dunstan. "Not that!"

The man took a step forward, mouthing horribly. For the first time, Dunstan noticed little horns on the man's head. His mouth was full of ugly teeth, and he had the slavering jaws of a wolf.

Dunstan started back. The man swooped through the air toward him. He had great black wings, like a bat.

Screaming, Dunstan turned and ran at top speed while the sound of flapping wings and running feet came from behind. Doubling and dodging down narrow, twisting corridors, he finally outdistanced pursuit. He stopped suddenly, that strange feeling seizing hold as though it were a powerful hand throttling him.

"No. I won't go back," he said stubbornly.

When he reached the end of the corridor, he saw light coming through a thick glass window. He peered in furtively. The room was glaring white under a cluster of powerful lights—cases of glittering instruments, sterilizers. Four white-robed men were gathered about a swathed figure on an operating table beneath the lights. Nurses flitted about soberly and efficiently. There was an atmosphere of suspense.

The doctors' voices came plainly.

"It would be interesting to know what goes on in a mind like this as it hears the call of returning sanity."

"But, have you ever stopped to think that some of these people may not thank us? They may regret recovering."

"Why?"

"Well, take this case, for instance. It is a sad case. He poisoned his best friend in order to marry the wife, and she immediately married another man. If he recovers completely, will he not find himself again in the situation that drove him mad? If he could not stand it fourteen years ago, will he be able to stand it tomorrow, or the next day?"

"I see. That's a good point. You fear a brief period of sanity and a relapse?"

"Yes."

"On the other hand, time works wonders in such cases. When you wake in the morning you are conscious of considerable time having elapsed since you went to sleep. I'm counting on the long period of fourteen years to exercise some curative effect."

"Well, we shall know more when the shock wears off."

The people were gone and still Dunstan stared at the white-shrouded figure on the table. It wasn't possible they were talking about him. Fourteen years! Yet the poor devil in there had an almost identical case.

Of a sudden the strange feeling came again. It was overpowering. He fought against it, trembling and perspiring. Then the white-swathed figure turned its head toward him. It raised a hand and mutely beckoned, imperiously.

With a sigh, he gave up. What was the use of fighting it? At least there would be no more hurrying aimlessly down unending corridors, opening countless doors, or listening when they were locked. He had been down hundreds of miles of corridors and hallways and passages. There had been thousands of doors that he had tried only to find them locked against him or leading nowhere.

Silently he went in and crawled up on the empty operating table. It was good to stretch out, and he felt at peace again. He thought he would go to sleep. But his serenity was disturbed by the sound of hurrying feet. For an agonized moment he thought that the man, or the wolf, or the bat—whatever it had been—was still hunting him and had caught up.

Annabelle burst in.

"Oh, darling!" she gasped, throwing herself upon him and kissing him madly. "Just think what it means to us. I'm free! Pudgy hit a bridge abutment, doing ninety in his racer, and I have all his money. Now, if the operation is a success, you will be free, too! Darling, think of you and me together."

He tried to raise a hand to push her away. In horror, he discovered that someone had strapped him down. His feet were similarly tied. Great, broad straps fastened him to the table. He struggled futilely as she kissed him again and again. He groaned in anguish.

His mouth felt cold and wet and slimy, like a dead oyster. It was like being attacked by an octopus.

"Take her away, somebody!" he shouted.

She raised up and studied him gravely. He shut his eyes tight for a moment, loathing the face that had once driven him mad. When he opened his eyes again, he examined her in astonishment. He had never noticed that her eyes were brown before. And there were freckles on her nose. Her hair was red, and what was that dinky-looking cap thing doing on top of it? She looked like a nurse. She was a nurse.

In consternation, he stared about the room. It was like most hospital rooms, very plain, with a bed, a dresser, a chair. The windows were open, and a bright hot sun was shining in. There was a cool breeze billowing the white curtain.

He saw that the nurse had not been kissing him at all. She had a pad of wet gauze in her hand and had been wiping his mouth. On closer inspection, he saw that she was not anything like Annabelle.

"Where are all those people who had me strapped down?" he queried.

"Oh, that was hours ago, in the operating room," she replied. "I shall have to tell Dr. Pembroke that the shock of the insulin has worn off and that you seem quite normal."

"Wait a moment," he said quickly, as she turned to go. "Are you familiar with my case?"

"Yes."

"Do you know Mrs. Benjamin Westcott, who was Mrs. Alan Dunbar?"

"She's a Mrs. Somebody Else now," the nurse replied. "I can't recollect the name. She's married again and lives in Europe. Mr. Westcott was killed some years ago in an auto accident."

Her eyes were a little cold, aloof and impersonal.

"But I didn't do it, you know," he insisted.

"Yes, we know."

He studied her gloomily. People would always be like that. If he were cured, after all these years, he might be freed, but other people would never be cured. To them he would always be the murderer of Alan because he loved Alan's wife.

But what of it? Alan knew.

Pembroke had been right. Time had worked changes whether he had been aware of the process or not.

"Have you a mirror?" he asked.

She went to the dresser and fetched one. He studied his reflection a long time, critically. His hair was white, his face deep-lined. Fourteen years since he had seen that face. Amazing changes. But, on the whole, not bad.

"What are you worrying about now?" the nurse asked.

"I'm considering the relapse," he replied, briefly. And then, at her questioning look. "One of the other fellows down there said I might have one."

"Were you conscious at that time?" she queried sharply, a worried look making a little crease between her brows.

He didn't answer immediately for he was still looking into the glass and thinking deeply. Imagine Annabelle after three husbands, a fortune to squander, and fourteen years. He tried to picture her with gray hair and wrinkled skin. He suddenly found he was not interested in picturing her in any fashion.

"Were you conscious?" she repeated.

"You'd be surprised," he grinned.

"I'm more than surprised; I'm dumfounded. I've never heard of such a thing. I shall have to tell Dr. Pembroke at once."

But, as she reached the door, he raised his head again to look after her. "However," he said gravely, "you might tell the other fellow something."

She cast an inquiring glance back over her shoulder, her hand on the knob.

Dunstan Raynor chuckled. "Tell him there will be no relapse," he said.

THE END

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DISBELIEF

Around 1800, there was a considerable fall of meteorites in France, and the mayor and other officials of the little town near which the fall occurred sent to the French Academy of Sciences a witnessed, sworn statement of the actuality of the fall. At that date, science had not accepted the fact of the fall of meteorites from the heavens, as there was no theory which would make such an occurrence reasonable. The French Academy ignored the statement officially, and unofficially referred to it as an outstanding example of mass credulity.

Shortly thereafter, the curator of the Museum of Natural History of Vienna officially warned museum societies against the display of so-called aërolites, because the display of these mythical things, of the same order of credibility as a piece of unicorn horn would be, would detract from the value of the rest of the collection. It was not until 1829 that a book appeared—printed in Vienna, incidentally—containing such an abundance of evidence as to convince skeptics of the existence of meteorites, and leading to an explanation of the puzzle. Meteorites became pieces of the jig-saw puzzle pattern of science when it was realized they were tiny planetoids, revolving about the Sun in vast numbers in eccentric orbits which Earth's movements intersected.

JESUS SHOES

BY ALLAN R. BOSWORTH

Concerning a man who had absolute faith in what he had been told — absolute and undoubting faith —

This letter I got a couple or days ago was a long time in the mails. It was addressed to "Dr. Carl Seers, Battleship *Vermont*, United States Navy." There isn't a battleship *Vermont* any more; there never was a Dr. Carl Seers, so far as I know. The letter went to the Navy Department, and somebody figured out that it was meant for Chief Pharmacist's Mate Carl Seers. You see, most everybody calls a pharmacist's mate "Doc."

Then the letter followed me through two transfers from shore duty in Eleventh Naval District to my present billet in a ship which is helping survey and build our new bases in the Caribbean. The odd thing is that it caught up with me at its starting point—it had been postmarked Port au Prince in the first place. It said:

Dear Sir:

Please communicate with the undersigned relative to a request made by a navy man you may remember from long ago—one Petit Jean, deceased.

Very truly yours,

Rev. Milton Lane.

I've been in the navy nearly thirty years, and I was on my first cruise then. But I remembered, after pronouncing the name a few times. Petit Jean—Pettijohn! Parson John Pettijohn, wardroom mess attendant. Back in 1916, and aboard the old *Vermont*, sure enough. I read the letter again.

"—relative to a request . . . one Petit Jean, deceased—"

Then I was a little frightened, thinking that somebody who served with me in the sick bay of the *Vermont* must have told what happened that night nearly twenty-five years ago. I remembered the Parson's last request. I granted it because I was kidding him, like everybody else on the *Vermont* kidded him. It was his last request because it killed him—

I was remembering it all, and worrying about it, when I went ashore yesterday to look up the Rev. Mr. Lane.

The Parson shipped in New Orleans, sometime in 1915, and the *Vermont* was his first and last ship. He was only medium height, but no wider than a deck plank,

and that made him look tall. He was blacker than the coal the old *Vermont* burned. And dumb! He couldn't write his own name—maybe that's how it became Pettijohn on the records.

He was a crazy sort of shine. You could see it in his eyes, especially in the way he rolled them, showing their whites, when he talked about religion. They called him "Parson" when he revealed that he'd heard "the call of the Lawd" and had joined the navy to save enough money to study for the ministry.

Right away, he became the butt of all the jokes. I guess it was because he took the joking in such a funny way—good-naturedly enough, but with a wistful, hurt sort of look. Like a child who's trusted in something that turns out to be false. That was the Parson all over—a child and trusting. If he liked you, he trusted you; if he believed in a thing, you couldn't shake his belief. He was just a simple, dumb black boy who was sure he'd "heard the call."

They sent him for buckets of steam. He stood lookout watches for mythical mail buoys. He ran all over the ship looking for cans of striped paint, plank stretchers, hammock ladders and left-handed monkey wrenches. The last time he stood a mail-buoy watch, something came floating past the bow, and the Parson fell over the side trying to reach it with his eight-foot boat hook.

That stopped the practical joking—by executive order. Because the Parson couldn't swim a stroke, and he should have been dead, by rights, before the lifeboat crew picked him up.

But he wasn't. We gave him artificial respiration in the sick bay, and he choked, and rolled the whites of his eyes and said: "Ah jes' prayed! Ah prayed, and the Lawd heah me even undah all that watah—"

We laid off, after that. We didn't see much of him for a time, except at church services. When the chaplain preached on deck, Sundays, the Parson was always listening, rolling his eyes and looking as if he were about to start shouting any minute. What was more, he could remember every word of the sermon—he couldn't read, but he could quote Scriptures for an hour.

Then he killed a man.

It was during maneuvers off Guantánamo Bay. A Filipino steward got tanked up on rum smuggled aboard from a bumboat, and pulled a knife on the Parson. If the Parson had gone to trial, I'm sure the court-martial would have acquitted him, because it was pretty plainly a case of self-defense.

But the trial never was held. The Parson's cheek was laid open—it was that close—and I had to go down to the brig every day for a week, dressing the cut. Then he got an infection, ran a temperature, and had to be brought up to the sick bay and turned in with a marine guard standing by twenty-four hours of the day.

I remember how he lay there in delirium, tossing and rolling his eyes; he babbled about the "curse of Cain" and wailed wordlessly in a queer, minor key that was enough to make anybody break out with goose pimples every time he heard it. Then he got better, but the doctor wasn't taking any chances. He ordered the Parson kept on the sick list for a while.

I was cleaning out my locker, that evening—we were en route to Puerto Rico, and I planned to make a liberty in San Juan. The Parson saw me pull out a pair of huge wooden shoes, Dutch *sabots* I had bought for a souvenir when the *Vermont* took in Amsterdam on a midshipmen's cruise.

He said, "Whut's them, Doc?"

I winked at another pharmacist's mate. "Them?" I said. "Why, they're Jesus shoes. Surely you've heard of Jesus shoes, haven't you, Parson?"

This is an old gag in the navy, and it's still used today. But the Parson was new in the outfit; he never had heard it. I explained that if a man had a pair of Jesus shoes, he could walk on water. He didn't have to wait for a shore boat when he wanted to hit the beach for a liberty.

I said: "You know, Parson. It tells in the Bible how Christ walked across the River Jordan—"

"You hadn't ought to talk like that, Doc!" he told me. "It wasn't the River Jordan. It was the Sea of Galilee. You hadn't ought to talk that way."

I winked at the marine sentry. "Well, wherever it was," I said, "these are the kind. See, they're made out of wood. You want to get yourself a pair of Jesus shoes some day, Parson."

The Parson rolled his eyes. He said, "Could I sho' enough walk on the watah with them shoes, Doc?"

"It's been done, hasn't it?" I asked him.

He nodded. And he watched me awhile, as I straightened my gear in the locker, then said: "Could I borrow them shoes sometime, Doc?"

I thought it would be fun if the Parson really took them ashore and tried walking out in the surf with them. He'd have done it, too. He liked me, and he believed anything I told him. And there wasn't room in the locker for all the gadgets I'd been accumulating.

"Tell you what, Parson," I said. "It'll give you this pair of Jesus shoes, if they'll fit you. Try 'em on!"

He did. His feet were big and flat; the *sabots* fitted him perfectly. And he was as tickled as only a darky can be.

That request to borrow those shoes was the Parson's last. Later that night, the marine went into the passageway to smoke a cigarette, and a yell from another patient brought him back on the jump. The Parson had crawled through a porthole—wearing the Jesus shoes.

The marine sounded the alarm. They dropped flares and put over two boats. They searched for an hour, without finding even one of the shoes. I kept quiet about that part of it, and so did everybody else—telling wouldn't bring the Parson back. We were twenty-odd miles from land at the time—

I remembered all this, going up a crooked, sun-blazed street toward the house where the Rev. Milton Lane lived. After nearly twenty-five years somebody *had* told. Not the marine, because he died in Belleau Wood. And that other pharmacist's mate left the service after one

cruise. I thought it must have been the patient who sat up and yelled; I have forgotten his name.

I thought, *"Well, it's caught up with me!"* and I knocked on the door.

The Rev. Milton Lane was a big man in a white linen suit. He didn't look like a preacher. And he was young—he couldn't have been much over twenty-five. He showed me to a cool terrace that overlooked the sea, and I introduced myself and told him I'd come about Pettijohn.

"Oh, Petit Jean!" he said. "I didn't connect the name. You're Dr. Seers—you took care of him when he had that cut on his cheek!"

I explained that I wasn't a doctor, but he didn't seem to hear. He stepped to the door and said something to a servant. I thought maybe he was sending for the police.

Then he came back and said: "His last request was very strange. I didn't explain it in my letter, because—"

"I know," I said. "It's been a long time. But I remember. The trouble was, the Parson—Pettijohn. I mean—believed anything you told him. He didn't know he was being kidded. He actually thought he could walk on water!"

"Say that again," Rev. Lane said.

I told him. I told him everything that happened after the Parson came to the *Vermont*, so he'd be more likely to understand what happened that night.

He shook his head. "And I never really believed him!" he said, as if he were talking to himself. "I didn't understand the request he made before he died, last year. I—"

"Last year!"

The servant came out before he spoke. Rev. Lane said: "Yes—Petit Jean died last year. For more than twenty years he was a preacher here in Haiti—he was more than that to the superstitious natives. He told them he had walked across the sea to bring them the word of God. And his last request was that I find you and send you these."

He was unwrapping the package the servant brought. I knew, even before I looked, that the package held a pair of wooden shoes.

THE END.

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FICTION

BY ALLAN GRANT

I have met my fate in an icy hate
  And drunk a toast to death;
And I've seen quite well of the gates of hell,
  And felt the devil's breath;

I have seen the sign in a glass of wine,
  And heard the call to love;
I have rid the land of a despot's hand,
  And climbed the skies above.

I have known as much of a fairy's touch
  And the spell that called her there
As I have of gods and the magic swords
  Of death and life they bear.

I have known the stars and the mystic Mars
  As well as local lanes;
I have known the sport of King Arthur's Court
  And tasted jungle rains:

For I listen long to the siren song
  That leads I know not where;
And I sail a sea where my soul is free—
  And never leave my chair.

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FROM

UNKNOWN WORLDS

1948 EDITION

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION